

COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHORT STORIES

VOLUME I

EDITORS

Dr. R. S. Regin Silvest

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Introduction

The E-Book entitled, COVID-19 Pandemic Short Stories Volume I has edited by Dr. R. S. Regin Silvest and Aara Mithilee M L. This Volume is a collection of 12 short stories (142 pages). In this brilliant collection, the readers can enjoy the reading from the writing of India, Pakistan, and Philippine writers. These writers present today's pandemic situation through their writing. Without knocking when COVID-19 entered at our home, we did not know that this VIRUS will bring darkness in many lives. This will be a game changer and effect so badly on our lives. Daily we are going through many serious challenges. We heard the words like 'Quarantine,' and 'Lockdown.' Before we were not so scared of any virus but now each and every day, we are playing the game of life and death. After World War II, this period has brought again the postmodern kind of situation in our lives. The absurdity and loneliness come in our life. Here, the aim of these writers is to highlight these issues and show silver lining in the sky.

The readers will be glad to read the COVID-19 stories and understand that how these stories are woven around the amazing characters. These short stories demonstrate that how we all are facing mental, health, and economic issues (like the fear, anxiety, the journey of life-death, economic crisis, and loneliness). If we see from the economical perspective, many laborer lose their jobs and poor people are not getting food for surviving. The basic surviving become a challenge for all of us. Thus, these writers focus on how it has brought the darkness in many lives, many died due to this COVID-19. People become more conscious for shaking hands, coming close and going out with wearing mask.

Each story tells the life during COVID-19 time, the time where many youngsters started working from the home, avoiding going out, struggling with their mental and economic issues. However, the lockdown is still continuing across all over the world and we all warriors are fighting against CORONA. After reading the story, we all will feel the same as the characters are dealing with COVID-19 as it is only the resemblance of our today's life.

But still authors believe that there is a hope and COVID-19 will give us a new life and soon it will disappear. The day will come soon to say, "GO! GO! CORONA GO CORONA.....BYE BYE CORONA."

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Foreword

The volume of short fictions and stories unites many and variable voices around the world regarding the virus named COVID-19. We aim to create a community around the current pandemic situation and sensitize the world. The pandemic anxiety and pressure are presented in the horizon of uncertainty. This pandemic time of anxiety could lay the ground of creative writing around the topic of pandemics and COVID-19. The descriptions of the fictions are written in a vivid style and manner and highlight the nature of the virus, the daily life of the protagonists, their emotions and thoughts as well as the inner and deep feelings which are created due to the pandemic global situation.

This volume is the first which includes creative forms of fiction writing through pandemic time. The diverse and multinational contributions which are extended from India to Pakistan etc. make a formidable intervention into the emerging field of pandemics. Contributors offer variable and diverse perspectives, explore, challenge and reimagine the concept of the virus that has been central to pandemic discourse. Stories and narrations of fictions help us to cope with the reality by allowing us to think and reconsider the virus through the plots, the scenarios etc. as well as to confront our worst fears and reclaim the nature of humanity in the face of danger and threat.

Through this volume all the fictions are some more titles to inspire and distract us. This volume will be an essential reading for any scholar and student who are working on contemporary literature and creative forms of writing.

Nikoleta Zampaki

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Editors



Dr. R. S. Regin Silvest is the President of Cape Comorin Trust and Director of Cape Comorin Publisher. He has organized Five International Conferences and Two National Conferences. He has edited 8 books with reputed publishers. He has presented various research papers in National and International Conferences. His area of specialization is American Literature. He has published more than a dozen of research papers in various reputed journals and books.



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1. Advanced but Damaged

Iqra Khurshid, Pakistan

Sunshine newspaper declared:

Four aliens come after listening voyager1 tape recorder to help the earthmen against COVID-19.

One researcher and Moonper has seen that creature. 8 Jun 2032

The story behind the story

He was sitting on his rocking chair but not visible, only the chair was moving back and forth. She was looking for her decorated face mask, she remembered six years back, she had seen some creatures covered their faces, and there also, it became a fashion. He was washing the grocery in the kitchen with slow hands but she was not doing any work just looking at him crazily. "Is there any covid balls today?"

"No." He replied with plane face.

"Why I am so bore". He thought about his new program. "Is it possible to make something innovative?" He pondered. "Do I dare to hurt the universe?" he asked from himself and most probably the answer was "NO". The chair was still moving.

Dr. Abdullah5 was looking outside the window. Everything on the earth was malformed after social distancing got universal admiration. The glass buildings were looking like glass dinner set on glass table. The ersatz birds

were sitting on artificial trees, no real sunshine, no real greenery, no love and concern could be felt for others. People were moving hurriedly. He watched the time and moved towards his class. At the end of the lecture, he had to take the flight to Lunar Express because he considered it most comfortable. He ended his lecture by saying “shoot for the moon and if you miss you will still be among the stars and maybe the covid balls”. Everybody was smiling; they all knew his style of using the quotes of legends related to the lecture. Then Leena³ asked him:

“Had you thought this in your childhood that one day you will become a great moonper of “Population Existence on Moon Program”(PEMP)?”

“No”. He smirked and started again

“But then we were not suffered form COVID-19, right? And now as you see I have been affected for three times in these thirteen years” he took a pause “and survived.” He giggled a bit which was not noticeable at least to those few lucky students who were still not attacked by the pandemic.

“But my father had a staunch belief that there are the evidences for the existence of life on moon and it might be an anodyne place from corona, he wanted me to prove the facts in front of world.”

“Your class is over Mr. Abdullah⁵. It’s 3:30am”. Said the robot and everybody shut down. “Ahh, what a life, no shaking hands, no party plans, no bewildered faces around the desk”

He set the DWS for having a chill weather. He sat in his flying vehicle and ordered his robot to go for LE. Now he was calling Praise.

“What are you looking for?”Ab asked her. “I lost my mask.” She was looking worried. He at once stood up and helped her to find her decorated mask, and

continued thinking about today's meeting points and the petrified aftermaths. "After today, you will not find it fashion anymore." He murmured.

The clarity about his new discovery could be comprehended from his gate. They entered in the Hall with dissimilar proposals. Everybody was sharing his designs but Ab was listening silently, at the end he declared:

"THERE IS ANOTHER CREATURE LIVING IN ANOTHER WORLD AND THEY NEED OUR HELP, TAOON IS DAMAGING THEIR SPHERE."

All and sundry including Pari was spellbound. A few began to cough mechanically, on the contrary. After a while, the OS (Officer Superior) came in his senses first and enquired "how do you get this information?" He looked at Pari who was still in condition of shock and smiled softly.

"There is no similarity between us and them, in fact they are highly advanced and cultured people even they are 2000 years advanced." No one looked to believe him. He joined "remember, you had given me a task six years ago to test what the thing was which fell from sky and I offered all my secret time on that mission". Pari watched him like a stranger but she couldn't stop him. OS remembered that thing which was so odd that they decided not to show the common people again because they were very frightened to see it and called it a miracle of God. He and two other researchers had chosen to research on this anomalous machine but they left it and took it as others did but he didn't stop and gave his six years according to their own calendar. When he discussed all the points of that machine OS asked him "what is your plan now?"

“Plan.” He looked at his wife and answered “I think we should try them and help them in this hour of need. In return, maybe we get some benefits for our world.”

“What if, they will get damaged again?” OS raised another important point. Some researchers were still astonished after listening this news. He was aware of the fact that nobody would go with him willingly except his wife and three apprentices.

“It’s not an incurable anymore. But the message I got from those living beings shows their helplessness despite been commendably advanced.” He added.

At the end of discussion, he got the acquiescence of OS to go at that planet which through his and others point of view, was a world of hostile faces But they all knew his passion and keenness. Pari was still fuming.

They were sharing their key points with emotionless disposition. “Mr. Abdullah⁵ and prais³ set your oxygen cylinders you will land at the surface of moon after 5 minutes.” They picked up their luggage without watching each other. Setting of weather was expensive, slow flower’s rain with sunlight, image of rainbow and colorful butterflies, nothing was real there. They, then entered in a glass building which was filled with fakeness even the smiles, relationships and body organs were forged. The Authorities announced his name for “Royal Prize” after examining his and his father’s hard work and solid theoretical arrangements for residents of Moon and somewhat safe life from the pandemic on earth. He received it and the prize was a “PEN”, only a pen but it was not taken as just a simple pen in those times. The authorities invited him to write something with it but, he did not remember his style of

writing. He thought for a while and then started writing “13”. It was truly a number and he got frightened for a moment, that if somebody examined him about the worth of that number then what would be the answer, as he missed his MSD (memory saving device). But not a soul paid attention on that except Prais. Receiving appreciations differently, he thought of something else.

He observed her expressions but she was impassive and talking to another handsome moonper, he also changed his gaze. “What could be expected from a partner who is two times affected only because of my craziness and still we are together” he thought and again filled with warmth. While they flew for back to earth, Prais asked him about the prize.

“No prize will heal the wounds of my father who was exiled just because he failed to prove his research. How cruel the Authorities are?” His repentance seemed to be unended.

“But the authorities were also right they thought he had spent a lot of money and resources but came with no positive results. And at that time world needed his good sequels.” Praise tried to explain Authorities.

He barely showed any response just glared somewhere beyond the surface where his father was not looking very happy but relaxed. Because he had suffered for twelve years of exile due to the hot-headed nature of earthmen and it was not a small punishment of a crime which he had not committed even consciously. “My father had not done any type of crime”. He shook his head furiously. “What’s the issue”? Prais got alarmed not because her partner was disturbed but because she had the apprehensions in her mind about driver robot’s password which could be hacked through her competitors and

they could get the true information related their connection, their qualms and agonies. She was much petulant about her and Abdullah's fake reputation.

But he cared for nothing today, and opened up for the first time "papa was very devoted to his work. He made a Voyager₁ tape recorder after a great effort because he had this faith that if the earth men were disabled in their discoveries to cure the universe, there must be any other creatures to be counted on in this condition."

"What was his resolution, you can trust me." She requested him and he opened his MSD and turned the screen to her.

She viewed his father and an odd structured machine for the residents of other planets; he putted a gold plate through which the earth researchers could watch the direction of their voyager's movement in different planets. At the cover of that gold plate he entered some digits and some gestures. Inside that gold plate he placed an old style disk in which he saved heavy information in the form of audio and video. On that gold plate, he entered a message of three lines written in OE (Old English) through pencil for the inhabitants of other planets (Aliens) and the message was:

"This is an invitation for you from the inhabitants of another world. It refers to our music, our emotions, our science and advanced technology, life style and of our voices. We were living our life peacefully since, an incurable disease had not affected us. We are seeking help from you and will feel delighted to solve your problems too."

With that note, a video was also attached that would be played automatically if any living being would touch that note. There, happy faces of males and

females with kids were displayed on the screen who were eating on their dining tables in a very peaceful environment. Then at once, the background music had transformed into scarier sounds, everybody was coughing, they were shown as shaking hands and the unaffected also started coughing and rolling on the floor. People, who were shown in the first clip were presented to be wearing masks on their faces. Indeed, it was a perfect depiction of COVID-19 for any sensible creature without using any spoken nuances.

“Woah what a project papa had made.” She couldn’t control her emotions even in front of her robot. “This is the best plan and I’m scared that his ideas can be copied or stolen. We can claim this in china courts as well as in LPC (Lunar Palace Court).” She added.

“There is no need dear. My father was proved wrong by authorities and that was more disgraceful than this. I assure you, he was not affected with the virus but with that universal disgrace.” He replied with a tired voice.

“Are you working on it again? She inquired him.

“NO it’s not much important for anyone after LP (Lunar Program) but who said these words?” He questioned her. “I don’t remember exactly”. She left arguing. For her, more important thing was to relieve him. “I just wish someone can take it from another planet and come here to help us, I’m still missing those times when we were not that distant socially. We should go to his home and spend some time with his memories”.

He could give her only a silent hopeful smile. So, he did so.

“Today I am entering another world whose people are loving and caring but are affected with Taoon. I hope we can assist them to get rid of it”. Including Pari, his two students could comprehend Ab’s exhilaration. “Hope he is still

waiting for us”. Traveling on the same voyager, they were penetrating his home address which he had noted down for them as neither he nor earthmen were familiar with the real story henceforth, it would be perilous for his people as well as for the newly arrived creatures. Contrary to the world they experienced there, it shocked them by every means. No darkness at late night, they all were watching everywhere with a captivated sight. The glass buildings, different type of fragrance, people’s movement in the light of night, a dissimilar dress code with masked faces were constantly pushing them to reconsider their decision. They all were speechless. People seemed so much busy that they had no leisure to realize an odd creature at their planet. “Is it a new corona reduction program from moonpers? Oh leave them with that fools’ paradise, we are alright with it now”. Two of the affected people had seen a voyager with COVID-19 was written on its body. Finally, they reached at the door of their host and the one who had invited them, but every now and then, they got things anomalous even the floor under their feet and the roof on their heads was not the same. Not only the other members, but their leader Ab was looking startled too. Now he realized that his scurry might endangered the lives of other members.

“Who is there?” Abdullah and Prais enquired in unison. Then they turned the lights on of drawing room. Those aliens covered their eyes due to the heavy light in the dark night. They all were unable to answer. Indeed, it was powerful shock from both sides. Abdullah examined everything with astound opened eyes. Then Ab acted in a usual manner first. But the small sized, their babies like creatures where one had an andi-ventilator (advanced mechanical incubation and ventilation) made him flabbergasted all over

again. Soon he covered himself and stabbed to clarify who they were, how they came into their planet, about their beliefs on the theology of Logocentrism, their damaged condition and overcome from the Taoon pandemic, and in which century they were living them.

Now it's their turn to be shocked. Abdullah and Prais saw four very tall (11 to 12feet) human like creatures dressed up with the material of older times and spoke a language similar to the ancient Latin. They told the name of their planet as well.

Speechless she was, Prais was observing every odd event with an implausible intellect as their nuances and their distancing from each other but, they were using Abdullah's father name which was enough to uncover the whole story. After taking a considerable time Abdullah seemed to be able to go near them and greet them with shaking hands because they are his father's guests. By that, his MSD started mentioning to use his sanitizer. He felt a lot of pain as well as ecstasy to meet those aliens.

After having a heavy peculiar breakfast, they both started talking to each other to remove the distance. The focus of interest was Abdullah's father and COVID-19. Ab was unable to accept it as true that how despondent life they were living and bearing a virus which not only damaged them physically but psychosomatically and their abrupt shift towards posthumanism. The hitches Ab faced after taking the responsibility to research on voyager₁ were also excruciating. He also told him about their desolations and shortage of food in the year of Taoon pandemic and pledge.

She was observing their robot cook very carefully. Abdullah tells them about robot servants and their complete reliance on them after corona outbreak. In

the room, Pari scrutinized every little perfunctory element. Prais showed her the great collection of masks. Prais took some pictures of her to show her society, she ordered some jewelry, perfumes, clothes and masks of her size. If her fashion designer was not a robot, he would definitely ask her “are you in your senses ma’am”. But robots do not ask question they only act upon what they have ordered by their masters. She started telling more about their invention to transform their status from transhumans to posthumans, “The Nexus 6 Robot type, Prais says, surpassed several classes of human classes (normals, advanced, specials) in terms of intelligence. They are like an inferior segment of humankind. For better or worse. The servant has in some cases more adroit than its master.”

There she watched a LCD set and asked about it. Prais informed her in a very simpler way “it is made for our enjoyment. Whatever we want to see according to our modes it will show us.” Once again Pari felt thunderstruck. But after a while she asked the tiny lady to show their planet and her home. At that time, Praise had no answer of this yearning. She simply answered her in latin “we are not as much advanced to cover your planet too”. But this desire had opened another way of advancement. “If the virus stops bothering us, we may manage to air that on national channel, somehow.” She added. After all we are the first posthumans to host outsiders. She kept motivating herself about this new project which could be thorny yet not unfeasible.

“I want to demonstrate the truth of COVID-19 and of your father in the van of your authorities and public”. Ab was still depressed because of his father’s shameful death who was a great inspiration for him throughout his research. Also, it was something hard to be assumed a creature exceeded the most

initial stage of humanism and Transhumanism and now successfully entered in the third and most advanced stage but still, were defeated by a small virus. Abdullah dispatched him a sad but admirable smile.

After three days

People arrived at the place to see the reality of Abdullah's father and the reality of a tiny virus that made its own place in their lives from last thirteen years. Those guests were getting special protocol by the Authority (out of six, two of them were on their anti-ventilators). At the time of Ab's arrival, everybody shouted with excitement. He first thanked to the humans and then to Dr. Abdullah's father, who gave him the ways to explore a different thing which their God has provided for them. He also told about Abdullah's secret researches that made their arrival possible.

"I consumed my six years on this project to only comprehend that how is it possible for an extremely advanced creature to be infected this badly and are unable to cure it." He paused. "It is only possible in one condition, if you yourself do not let it out from your planet." He looked at the Authorities, they seemed miserable. "I can not blame anyone but a researcher must be accepted with any results, positive or negative. And it seems you did not want to give him more time and now see you are also infected." The hall was With a big round of applause.

Ab then went to the damaged member of Authorities and gave him a liquid to drink. After a few seconds, he exhaled a long breathe and his eyes were sparkling. He ordered his device to remove his ventilator. He was fine then. Including Pari and his students, everyone was incredulous. The dream of most advanced planet came into reality after the great loss of thirteen years.

“How did you do that?” whispered Pari, when he was seated again. “I don’t know even.” He replied with a smirk. By that he moved to Abdullah⁵ and uncovered one secret solution of earthmen’s all quandaries and existence doubts. That was the firm belief on one entity which was the self and humanity, the concept of “Logocentrism” the concept in which the source of knowledge is not changed no matter how much scientifically advanced you proved to be. He stared at the less scientifically advanced creature who just proved today’s super advanced humans wrong with using the original water only, that he had taken from his home. Abdullah was also going to take it as a secret. He changed his position on his mood-device to be obscured. The chair was still moving.

2. The Social Amelioration

Bee Jay D. Olitres, Writer, Philippines

Fausto awakened from his sleep with an extra vibe of vigor and enthusiasm! Smiling, he scanned his room, with its walls of nipa palms knitted to form a drape, its rotten holes streaming with the reddish rays of the rising sun, an omen of hope and good fortune. He slowly arose, feeling his limp muscles unknot, as if regenerated from yesterday's overexertion. With body oozing with energy from restorative rest and a feeling of euphoria boiling in his pit of stomach, he left his bedroom basking in earthly bliss.

He opened the antiquated radio for want of news...

"Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus, the president has just placed the entire Philippines under the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). Under this state, no person is permitted to go outside their home unless they bear a quarantine pass controlled by the government, mass gathering is prohibited, travelling is banned (the public transportations have to cease in operating), all establishments are close (malls, schools, barber shops, etc.) except grocery stores/markets, and only skeletal forces are allowed to work on essential offices such as the governments. Others, stay home, quarantine yourself, and stay safe".

"Corona virus? Preposterous! Whatever that corona is. The entire barangay to stay indoors? Unheard of in his lifetime!", he could not believe what he just heard. "No one can imprison a man against his will", he mused;

indignant. "This is a democratic country. What about his toil for bread? Surely a man must labor to earn his keep!", he reasoned derisively while the transient joy slowly evaporated from his body. Losing his appetite, he quickly ate his breakfast consists of last night's left-overs (a scorched rice reheated paired with a medley of overcooked vegetables). "I must go to my "amos" , he thought while running in mind the tasks set out before him on that day. Josmar's house (fetch water from the well and fill the drum), Laide's pig stys (clean the excrements and feed the hogs), haul 50 gallons of purified water from Justy's to John's residence, dispose the garbage in Barbie's house, etc. The list could take on his entire day until he retires at dusk.

While traversing the road to his nearest patron, a group of friendly and harmless looking tanods, a type of local community peace officers, apprehend him.

"Oy compadre, pray what sends you outside, on this dangerous time?", one of the tanod asked." Haven't you heard the news?".

Fausto feigned ignorance, "news?", he croaked as if baffled.

"Yes, the ECQ or Enhanced Community Quarantine has been imposed starting today until further notice. Surely you know the sanctions for violating the quarantine!".

"Never have I heard such proclamations. I have to go to my clients' houses to complete errands sirs and take the "suhol " for my daily sustenance"

"Well ignorance of the law excuses not even you. Please come with us", one of the tanod said harshly, producing a handcuff to bind his wrists.

Fausto was stupefied, his heart beating as if a drum has been pounded on his chest." Great", he thought while his body stiffened. I must find a way out of

this mess. “But compadre”, he cleared his throat to mask his trembling while his aged frailty voice assailed the air, “surely you will give me a chance just this once to amend my ignorance. Take compassion and forgiveness on this uninformed old man. Surely, you have fathers and grandfathers my age, whose memory started to decline with age”, he woefully plead, appealing to the tanod’s good-heartedness. He hoped it was enough.

“Alright, just this once, we’ll let you go back, but no more second chance. You hear us?”, the tanod relented.

Fausto sighed with audible relief, tension easing from his body. “Thank you, lads. May the Lord God bless all of you”, he earnestly replied. “I must go back now, before you change your mind” he uttered while twisting his disheartened body back to his home. When the tanod can no longer see him, he ran as if nine hounds from hell were chasing after him. Despite his lungs about to burst from lack of air, he had not rested until after he was sure that the tanods were not in pursuit after him.” Whew”, he puffed ,” that was close!”

He dumbly walked, absorbed in thoughts as he traversed the road back to his wretched hut. “What should he do? “, he ruminated. Without his daily labors, he doesn’t have an income to buy for food: his life is a foot to mouth existence as far back as he can remember. How will he survive?” he despondently pondered while the energy slowly fled from him. “Stay at home, self-quarantine, viruses, covid-19” ...his mind throbbed while dreadful possibilities swirled disturbingly inside him.

The next day, the persistent and excited chattering from his neighbors, rouse him from his pessimistic contemplation. Words spread like wildfire that the

government is giving dole out money to help those affected by the covid-19 pandemic. This program, dubbed as the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) was conceptualized by the Philippine government to help the affected residents weather temporarily the loss of income. Each qualified resident will receive 6000 pesos to fend for their needs.

He went outside his humble dwelling and saw social workers, recognizable in their ID's, handing out social amelioration forms. In the blink of an eye, they were completely surrounded by a mob of people like a moth attracted to the flame. Each hoping to be the first to put their hands on the social amelioration form. A signage on the side of the venue reminds everyone to follow social distancing, "1 meter apart, no touching, wear mask", to avoid the spread of viruses, but people were oblivious to the precautionary instructions including Fausto.

"This then is the answer to my woes", he talked to himself. He hobbled out towards the venue, exaggerating his frailty to attract attention and hopefully, assistance. A social worker, seeing him limping towards the front with so much difficulty, waved back the crowd to give way for him, after all, elderly and pregnant women are mandated by law to be prioritized. He took the form proffered by the woman, his face manifesting a mask of gratitude. Soon enough, many able hands offered him help in filling in the amelioration form, each eagerly exuding goodness and benefaction out of respect to his old age. With assistance, he carefully filled in the form with utmost reverence despite difficulties due to his minimal literacy. He ended the ordeal by ticking off the box that indicated of his social status, "Single". Then he passed the form to the amiable social worker, who waited patiently

for his submission, looking at him with undisguised fondness and Fausto with fervent hope alight in his wrinkly eyes, gratefully thanked her for her generous guidance. He was assured by the woman that she will look personally on his stake on the fund and was told to simply wait for the fund's release date.

The succeeding days of waiting is a torment like no other. Fausto stretched his resources, already straining hard for lack of income. He ate canned foods, apportioning 1 small can for two days. His rice intake was also cut shortly and sparingly to last longer than was possible to keep himself alive. He even experienced eating a plain rice meal paired with salt for viand, but he made no complaints. His resolve was strengthened by just thinking of the social amelioration fund to come to his hands on the coming days.

Weeks passed, and the waiting stretched on like forever. While the corona virus raged, the local government implemented programs to help the vulnerable masses. For instance, each barangay distributed "ayuda", a kind of package comprise of 5 kilos of rice, canned goods, noodles, and sugar to alleviate the daily sustenance of the citizens. People were instructed to fall in line and present the "claim stub" given by the government to claim one package. Of course, during the distribution Fausto was there himself. He patiently waited for his turn on the line, despite the sweltering heat of the summer, just so he can sink his hands into the coveted package, literally his salvation from impending starvation. The line moves in a caterpillar pace as each tak-a-tak signals that a stub was torn, and one more pack was handed, breaking the monotony of the mournful atmosphere of the proceeding while also portending the dwindling of the stocks left for distribution. Still, an

eternity away from the frontline of the dispensation, Fausto's heart sank when he saw the pile started to shrink, until not a single pack was visible for handing over.

"That's it then, another hope crushed!!", he thought bitterly while his eyes enviously looked into the happy faces of people who received the goods." Why was I always deprive to the things I desired ardently? he contemplated miserably, while feeling dejectedly low." Is it wrong to try preserving himself, because life seems sweeter, when death is about to snatch it ?"

"Alright!", a voice rising above the general uproar of indignation boomed, "Since the stocks are not enough for the lot us, the budget being tight", the local official announced, "a second tranche of ayuda distribution will be scheduled. Please just keep your stubs", he ended condescendingly to placate the grumpy faces of the dissatisfied crowd.

Hostility pervaded in them including Fausto while they were heading their way back to their dwellings. Some nosy citizens let loose rumors that only the relatives of the social workers, barangay officials' and those of their friends were prioritized with the claim stub. Weeks quickly pass, but the promise of the second tranche was buried to oblivion. The distribution of "ayuda", being dismally tainted with corruption and ordinary citizens were none the richer for it.

While the days turned, grumblings also abounded and circulated about the social workers' supposed implicit illegal activities in the SAP fund's distribution. They, it was whispered, have poisoned the system of determining the SAP beneficiaries. For instance, there were idle talks from presumed reliable sources that even a deceased person has been approved to

benefit from the money and “ghost citizens” were also listed. These ghost citizens did not really exist but the fund was claimed in behalf of their names. Others were gossiped to be guilty of prioritizing their relatives and friends while some needy individuals are denied application/access. In other words, the SAP distribution was reeking with filthy issues of greed. Through it all, Fausto was feeling helpless and confused, resigned somewhat in his lack of knowledge, but bolstered by the reassurance of a stranger worker’s promise. “Surely, the government would not deny him of his rights to the amelioration fund because of his manifest destitution and old age. He barely had something to eat but still, he has faith in man’s innate goodness, reminiscing the reassuring smiles of the social worker of an angel”, he convinced himself.

When the Day of the Distribution came, his anticipation has reached its climax. The venue was situated in the barangay’s gym. Despite his early bid to fall in line, the place was choked with human bodies densely packed like a writhing mass of super worms. Social distancing was not observed, people elbowed and pushed each other to place themselves at the forefront of the distribution. Positioning to the front is a battle in itself, with tangle of limbs pressing against him on every direction. Squeezing his fragile torso to pass amidst the crowd is a next to impossible feat. The organizer was caught unprepared with the influx of people and the lack of proper planning of the distribution scheme, amplified the confusion. At long last, Fausto successfully planted himself in the front despite the trophy of bruises he earned while making his way to the coveted spot.

“Name sir?” the officer lazily asked, looking bored. The woman on the forms’ distribution was not to be found.

“Fausto Da...” He recited his given name eagerly. The officer nod as he scanned the list of beneficiaries in his log sheet, eyes darting this and that, like a nervous rat. He frowned his forehead and asked the spelling as if to make sure he heard it right.

F-A-U-S... (ef-ey-yow-es-...) Fausto drawled the string of letters that comprised his identity with mouth unrefined with certainty.

“Okay. You are NOT on this list sir!”, the officer declared flatly; his eyes devoid of clemency.

Again? He asked somewhat loud and sharply.

“You are not included in the list of beneficiaries!”

Fausto’s ear twitched, as if a thunder has pealed on his eardrum. “You must be mistaken; I need the money”. He said hotly with tone of dagger tips piercing the noise of the crowd. “I am entitled to benefit from the aid because I am impoverished. His voiced heavily laced with emotion, the pleading voice inflected with lisp like a child about to cry.

“You heard me; you are disqualified because you are living alone. Single. Only a household with family members to feed are entitled to the cash aid”, the officer blandly intoned.

Fausto’s heart is about to burst with bitterness.” How can I keep myself alive?”, he whispered hoarsely, while streaks of tears race down against his cheeks, dimming his eyesight as he saw in his peripherals the dim faces of people looking at him with undisguised pity. He bowed his head and turned to leave, a river of tears flowing freely from his eyes. He willed his leaden feet

to move amidst the sympathetic mask of faces glancing his way, as if telling him in silence that they too were also helpless. He endured his walk of ignominy while his mind screamed of injustice and hatred against the society who tightened the noose on his bony neck. "I do not need your pity, I need the help you denied me; I only want to live", he lamented sadly as he painfully trod back to his empty and dilapidated shack, a walking corpse desiccated of the will to live; a zombie benumbed of feelings. How will he survive?

When he reached his home, the woman from the form distribution waits for him on the doorway. She was holding a bundle of money outstretched towards him and his shaking hands. Fausto could not help, but on the second time that day, he cried like a baby. Dam of tears spilled from his eyes unabashedly, as he finally held the wad of cash aloft in his unbelieving fingers. Unable to contain his joy, he laughed and cried at the same time, crumpling the money in his fist, as if making sure that he was not asleep. But the paper is pliable in his hands. Alas! he was convinced he was not dreaming!!!

He found out later from the woman that all senior citizens are qualified beneficiaries of SAP, except those receiving monthly pensions from their retirement. The release of fund was conducted house to house, because seniors are at high risk when exposed to crowded places. Fausto can only agree with profound happiness.

The next day, news spread that the people who attended the social amelioration subsidy releasing have been massively infected with covid-19. It was found out that there are asymptomatic individuals who appeared before

the social workers to stake their claims on the social aid. And Fausto, alone in his hovel, awaken with a sky-high temperature and a sore throat raging in his weakened body.

3. Life Made Better

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“Lockdown!?”

What is lockdown? What does it mean?”

Lakshmi asked curiously looking at Sravya who was reading out news to her mother from The Hindu as she does regularly. Sravya lifted her head from the newspaper and said, “Amma, it is a state of restricted access or isolation instituted by the State as a security measure to regain control during a riot or any unprecedented outburst.”

“Ay... what does it mean? You still confuse me,” said Lakshmi.

Looking at her perplexed face, Sravya was explaining the meaning in detail. Right then Murthy, Lakshmi’s husband, stepped into the drawing room wiping his face with the towel on his shoulder.

“Hi Pappa, Subhodayam,” wished Sravya.

“Subhodayam, My Dear! It seems something interesting is going on between you two!” asked Murthy with a pleasant smile.

“Yes Pappa, I am explaining the meaning of lockdown to Mom and the severity of the recent epidemic that is shaking the whole world,” said Sravya handing him a cup of warm milk. Sravya was doing MBA from IIM-Kozhikode, Kerala. She was a very proactive girl from the childhood, whose aim was to achieve the best in everything. At the same time, she was not a

book worm; she always spends quality time with the family and shares lot of information, knowledge and happenings round the world in the form of interesting conversations with her mother. She took lot of pleasure in reading out news to her mother and going for a detailed analysis of the same. Lakshmi also enjoys her presence very much as she was a complete contrast to her brother, Ganesh, who always seemed preoccupied with some or the other work. But he was a very affectionate son to both the parents who loved them for their simplicity and practical thinking. He had great admiration and reverence for his father, who, in spite of much turbulence in his childhood life, earned position and status with his ethical, industrious and meticulous nature.

Lakshmi also sat beside Murthy with her glass of lukewarm coffee. She had a habit of having anything lukewarm, not sizzling. Their choices didn't change since the day of their being together. Each one respected the other's taste; such was their compatibility. He was an honest and sincere person working for the State Bank of India as Manager; one year short of retirement. Lakshmi was a contented home maker taking care of everybody with utmost keenness and promptness. Her priority for tradition and culture goes in perfect match with that of her husband's. Murthy buried his face in the newspaper while Lakshmi and Sravya discussed many things in detail about Corona virus, precautions to be taken, world scenario and the precautionary measure of 'lockdown' taken by the Indian Government, etc.

Suddenly Lakshmi looked around and asked, "Where is Sneha? Didn't she come out of her bedroom? Go Sravya, have a look. Wake her up, if she

hasn't, till now. It's getting delayed. She has to take her breakfast. Go, go... hurry up. Why everybody is so lazy these days? How do we finish things in time? Moreover, Sneha has to take everything in time. Get up, get up."

Saying so, she rose from the sofa and moved towards the kitchen while Sravya moved towards Sneha's room. Murthy moved to the puja room to spend the pleasant morning time in front of the Goddess, meditating Gayatri Mantra as many times as possible. He believed that a strong spiritual mind gives a strong and sacred body. He even opined, "God's ways are always mysterious and it is man's wisdom to interpret them and realize the changes he is expected to make in his life." Hence he preferred to spend more time in meditating the Gayatri Manthra during that unexpected free time.

Sneha was Mr and Mrs Murthy's daughter-in-law. She was a tall, fair complexioned, beautiful girl with big round eyes, reserved in nature. She was a little proud of her striking and attractive appearance. She hailed from a traditional family in Ampapuram, a village close to the city of Vijayawada, in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Her parents were teachers in the local High School who earned much fame and name more than money. Ganesh met her for the first time in his office at Gurgaon, when she reported under him. He was the topper of his College, who got selected in a prestigious MNC with good appreciation in the campus selections. That kind of an easy success in life made Ganesh a little superior and overconfident. Gurgaon is a city in the state of Haryana in Northern India, known especially as financial and technology hub. Sneha's pride soared a little more after getting placed in that company. In that city she lived with a few of her colleagues as paying guest in a flat. Her systematic life style, organized conduct, efficient work

and smart way of carrying herself attracted Ganesh much closer to her. Her pride and Ganesh's attitude matched perfectly. In the course of time she too considered his proposal and agreed to marry him. Ganesh had to wage a mini war with both the families for marrying her. Sneha's parents were completely prejudiced and a little suspicious whether their financial status would bring down the status of their daughter in the family that was well settled. Mr and Mrs Murthy also remained a little stringent till the girl's family gave complete clearance. Finally Ganesh is able to bring his first love into his life successfully. He felt he was on the top of the world with the hand of his beloved in his and imagined a lovely life ahead.

Very shortly after the marriage, Ganesh's stars steered him on to the path of excellent luck; he got an opportunity to work for a couple of years in California. He readily accepted the offer and immediately left India with his wife happily. This journey into a new world very soon after the marriage gave Sneha and Ganesh considerable privacy and quality time to spend in complete pleasant moods, away from all mumble and grumble. But soon Sneha was pregnant and had suffered severe morning sickness. She became very weak as she could not take proper care of herself. She had not enough strength to prepare and have nutrient food. That made her condition even more deplorable. Ganesh felt much desperate and when took doctor's advice, got shocked to know that she was even suffering from 'Eclampsia,' which had to be seriously considered. It is a critical condition in which the pregnant woman suffers from high blood pressure and would have severe sudden convolutions. He was suggested to give her complete vigilance and bed rest.

So in order to meet any unforeseen emergency, he left her under the care of his parents in Vijayawada and rushed back to California. Her native place, Ampapuram had meagre availability for medical emergency. Hence, half-heartedly she had to agree to his decision. He convinced his in-laws to visit her once a week and give her necessary comfort, confidence and solace. Unfortunately, very immediately after his return to California, the situation across the world had got into the cold clutches of CORONA followed by instant 'lockdown.' Sneha got completely upset as her parents were unable to come to her and it was impossible for her to spend time with them in times of need.

Thus she was destined to live with her in-laws in Vijayawada. Initially they all worried about Ganesh as he was left completely alone in a distant land in such risky and difficult times; but after repeated video calls to him and from him, they felt relaxed and confident. He explained to all of them how he took necessary care of himself in all aspects.

"Though it is an odd and tough situation," Lakshmi said, "In one way Sneha got an opportunity to stay with us and get accustomed living with us."

Even Murthy felt happy with that unforeseen situation. He said, "Yeah, this may bring our daughter-in-law close to us." Thus they liked her and her presence very much.

But she needed some more time to come out of her anguish and lead a normal life. Though everybody in the house was so cordial and welcoming, there was something that she always felt missing. The more they tried to go close to her, the more she recoiled. That was the first time for her to stay

away from Ganesh and stay with his parents in his absence. Ganesh empathized with her discomfort and pain, and hence spent considerable time with her on video calls to console her to the most. But, of late, he had been puzzling with the kind of complaints she made about his parents. He couldn't decide whether to talk to them once and make things transparent on both sides or wait patiently till the bonding established. However, he decided to be diplomatically quiet; as he considered patience, the best teacher. But the seed of suspicion about his parents' treatment to his wife started germinating in him slowly.

"Vadina! Are you awake? Oh Vadina! What are you doing? Amma is calling you, ..."

Sravya knocked the door of Sneha's room. After a few seconds the door opened and there stood Sneha in her night wear which she used to wear in California. She knew pretty well that Lakshmi didn't like her wearing that in their house. She felt it was not that decent to wear it in their house. Once she told Sneha very clearly about the same.

"Please avoid such dresses as long as you stay with us my dear. You are not that used to our way of living. I prefer transparency among us to avoid misunderstanding. That's why I am telling you openly about it. It's your wish when you are with Ganesh in California, but try not to use them here. Don't feel bad about this Sneha, hope you understand."

But Sneha ignored her words often, intentionally or casually, only God knows.

She came out with a puzzling face, asking, "What Sravya, has anything gone wrong? Why did you knock the door so hard?"

Sravya got irritated at those careless words; but simply said, “Mom is asking about you, she wants to see you, meet her once.”

Then Sneha proceeded to kitchen calling out, “Attamma, it seems you asked for me, what is the reason?”

“Ah Sneha, it’s getting delayed na! Come, take this glass of milk, then take bath and come soon for breakfast. By the way, didn’t you have a nice sleep in the night? I have been waiting for you to come out, how do you feel? Is everything alright?”

She knows the difficulties of a woman in her advanced pregnancy while sleeping; some discomfort, some ache here or there, weird experiences. Lakshmi tried to replace her mother by all means.

“Yeah Attamma, I am perfectly fine. Just couldn’t wake up early, that’s all,” said Sneha. Lakshmi observed the night wear she wore in spite of her instruction; but remained silent. Sneha also noticed the keen observation with which Lakshmi had been looking at her dress while speaking to her. But she deliberately remained unnoticed. Just then Sneha received a call from her mother and went out of the lobby into the front garden where she chatted with her much leisurely having a stroll under the shade of the wide spread neem and gulmohar trees there. After a long chat with her mother Sneha went inside and shut the door. Lakshmi didn’t understand anything. She waited and called her out after some time for breakfast. Her face was pale when she came out and had the idly sambar with disinterest. Lakshmi observed Sneha from the corner of her eye and noticed the change in her mood after the phone call.

“What happened to you Sneha? You look dull again. Hope your parents are doing well. But for this lockdown, they too would have stayed with us here. Anyway, don’t worry. Feel free and try to be pleasant. Come, sit in the hall and watch TV for some time. Otherwise, your father-in-law has an interesting collection of spiritual books. Take any book of your choice and spend time reading. It is a very good pass time as well as refuge from all uncalled for thoughts.”

“No Attamma, I am not interested in any of those books. I will engage myself differently,” said Sneha. She slowly got up and sat in front of TV. She never did anything as instructed or suggested by her. Though Lakshmi noticed such things, she kept quiet. Sneha and Sravya watched news on various channels covering corona virus attack and went on a world tour; of course via California, in their discussions.

In the afternoon, when Lakshmi was having a nap, Sravya and Sneha were playing carom board, which both of them liked the most. Then Sravya asked Sneha about her mother’s phone call. Sravya said that she was doing some gardening near the gate where she happened to overhear a few words. At first Sneha got confused and then embarrassed. She looked at Sravya in desperate silence and shock. But she could not help appreciating Sravya’s commonsense within herself for raising the topic in private.

Sravya again broke the silence saying, “Vadina, you are a part of our family. You may still take some time to get accustomed to this fact; but it is true. My parents are affectionate and sensible enough to support you in this odd situation. They even feel bad for you as you were missing your parents.

Amma wanted you to be healthy, happy and peaceful. Your physical and mental health will enable giving birth to a healthy child. I hope you noticed how your health improved slightly as you are in better care now taking nutritious food. When Amma and you went for check up the doctor said this, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Sneha. "Then what is troubling you still; share with me if you still find any inconvenience or hesitation with the elders. Feel free, tell me, ... please, only then you will be completely comfortable. Tell me, you need not hesitate, trust me," said Sravya.

"Nothing like that Sravya, everything is fine, Sneha spoke with great difficulty."

"I heard you telling your mother that you are unable to eat the food Amma is preparing, and moreover you wanted to eat a few items which you hesitate to tell my Amma, isn't it?" Sravya asked.

"Ah.. Yeah, but... that's alright Sravya, I will learn to adjust.. May be very soon." Sneha wished to evade the topic.

But Sravya continued, "Look Vadina, I repeat, feel free with us and accept my parents as those of yours. Ganesh also worried about you a lot when he came here to drop you. Mom promised him that she would definitely do her best attending to all your needs and emergencies. I know she is doing the same and she will do. She will definitely fulfil all your wishes or choices. Have a broad understanding of people with improved levels of observation. You will experience everything by yourself. I don't know what your mother told you during your call. But I insist your happiness is our happiness and your baby's happiness too."

Then suddenly Sneha broke into tears and started sobbing. Sravya got tensed, rose from her chair and went close to Sneha. She took her hand into hers, patted on her head and consoled her not to weep. Sneha then told her that she was missing her parents as well as Ganesh very badly. Thus she tried to subside and divert the whole issue.

Sravya easily felt her pulse and said, “Okay, leave the topic. I shouldn’t have asked you about it. Calm down, don’t cry, it’s not good to you as well as to the baby.”

Then they both parted to rest for a while. Sravya was able to read her mind basing on her responses to her mother over phone.

She thought seriously “I should find a relief to her problem. I understand, she wants more sympathy as she is suffering from identity crisis.” Finally she nodded her head with a smile as a spark of solution flashed her mind.

Next day morning, as usual, Sravya was reading out news from the newspaper to her mother when she was busily working in kitchen.

During breakfast, Sravya asked Sneha “What do you wish to have for lunch Vadina? Do you feel like having anything in particular, ah?”

There is a slight surprise and disbelief in her eyes. She said, “Why ask me? I am okay with anything.”

Then Sravya said, “Just casually I asked. Amma told me that ladies have some specific likes and dislikes during pregnancy. So I thought if we prepare something of your choice, then you will enjoy the food you take. Isn’t it? That’s why, tell me.”

Lakshmi also added, “That’s true my dear. I did not get this thought though I knew the fact. Tell me Sneha, what do you want me to prepare for today’s lunch?”

Looking at Sneha who was hesitating to speak out, Lakshmi said, “Feel free Sneha, I am like your mother. Ask me whatever you want as you ask your mother. I will prepare that for you. Anyway what we eat should be more interesting and relishing during this period particularly. People say that the baby in the womb also enjoys the food which the mother takes with interest and fondness.”

Then Sravya’s face glowed at once and she looked affectionately at her mother-in-law. Hesitatingly, slowly, she told her choice of items that she wished to have for the day.

“Superb! That’s very nice of you my dear! I too wish to eat them today. It’s been very long since we tasted those items,” said Murthy who was just then coming out of the puja room.

Sneha’s eyes once again sparkled. She understood that it was all happening because of Sravya who listened to her words the day before when she was talking to her mother.

“How easily and quickly these people welcome others into their life!” she thought.

“Even my in-laws are very open-minded, cool and caring people,” she appreciated and liked them wholeheartedly for the first time. Her heart became very light with unknown joy and excitement.

“My choice is preferred in this house! It is their choice too,” she exclaimed to herself.

That whole day she was on cloud nine and shared the same with Ganesh when he called her. She once again enquired how things were in California and how he had been taking care of himself, gave him all safety measures and precautions before the call concluded. He too felt very happy, relieved and delighted at the change in her tone.

Suddenly one day Sneha fell seriously sick. She was found lying unconscious on the bed.

“Amma... Pappa... hurry up, see here, something is wrong with Vadina.., come soon, at once!” Sravya screamed. Both Lakshmi and Murthy came running, in a shock.

“Sneha! Sneha!.. What happened, open your eyes... speak something,” Lakshmi was out of her senses and was shouting.

“Oh God! What shall we do? Sravya go and call the ambulance immediately,” said Murthy.

Lakshmi, don’t panic, don’t shout. You should be healthy to take care of Sneha. Remember that, control yourself. Calm down,” said Murthy.

Lakshmi, weeping, collapsed in the sofa with sobs and hiccups.

In no time the ambulance arrived, Sneha was hurried to the hospital and got admitted in the emergency-ward. It was a highly challenging situation at the hospital. As it was lockdown period due to Covid-19 attack, there were many procedures and other restrictions for Murthy’s family to attend to Sneha. Only Lakshmi was allowed to accompany her there. Murthy took special permission slip from the police to commute between the hospital and their

house; even in any odd hour under emergency. Sravya managed everything at home.

Sneha's parents worried a lot and her mother started wailing in the phone itself when she was informed.

"Oh my God! Please save my daughter, show mercy on us, our only child, we couldn't even go to her, huhuhuhu....," she sobbed. Her sorrow knows no bounds.

It's very difficult to control Sneha too. She is more worried about her baby as well as her mother, who was very delicate in health. With great difficulty Mr and Mrs Murthy managed to avoid her mother's phone to Sneha as she too started to lose her balance which worsened her situation once. On their personal request to the doctor, she told Sneha not to use phone for a few days as a preventive from virus as well as the radiation that might worsen her condition. She was put into the observation for a week.

The next day the doctor called Lakshmi to the consulting room and said, "Sneha's condition is slightly risky at present. Her blood pressure is fluctuating irregularly which is a bad sign for the baby too. Moreover, she is in the ninth month now. In this situation it is better if the baby is taken out by performing a surgery; otherwise things would go beyond our control."

"Okay doctor, I understand. You please proceed with whatever you think would suit the situation. We only want our daughter-in-law and the baby safe."

“That’s right; then we would go for the surgery tomorrow in the first hour,” decided the doctor and informed the same to her assistants and asked them to make arrangements.

That night Lakshmi and Murthy passed on the news to Sneha’s parents and Ganesh. Everybody spent that night with mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety. Sravya and Ganesh too shared many thoughts as a new member would be entering their family in no time and felt much excited. Lakshmi literally had to spend a sleepless night; praying to all the Gods in her list and making promises regarding the services she would offer after the baby and the Mom surpass that critical moments safely. Sneha’s parents had been calling her repeatedly to find out the situation. Without a blink she had been observing the condition of Sneha whenever she moved in bed. Sneha too felt much nervous; but tried to divert her thoughts as the doctor strictly warned her to maintain normal blood pressure without getting into any unnecessary thoughts or indulging in futile discussions on phone. She even observed the attentive vigilance of her mother-in-law and felt very thankful for all her care and service to her.

Next morning the surgery was done and a baby girl came into the world. Sneha’s condition was also stable as her blood pressure did not trouble much. She was in deep etherized sleep; peacefully, after a long time. The heads of both the families felt much relieved. Ganesh felt very happy and was eagerly waiting to see the baby. Thus, after all the formalities at the hospital, after a week, both the mother and the child were brought home. Sravya

welcomed the mother and the child in bouncing joy and kissed Sneha for the 'heavenly gift.'

"Thank you very much for this lovely precious gift, Vadina," said Sravya taking the baby into her hands.

"Goddess Lakshmi stepped into the house once again," said Lakshmi.

"That means am I the first Lakshmi?" asked Sravya.

"No, the Lakshmi of the house, my mistress is the first Lakshmi of the house, all rest fall next," said Murthy in loud excitement. Sravya and Sneha were pleased to see that excitement in the face of the new grandparents. "Which gift you want my dear 'Sneha'? Just ask me, I will sanction," said Murthy ecstatically.

Sneha just smiled and admired at the love and affection of her family who supported her in times of crisis both familial and societal.

Ganesh was jumping and was screaming with joy when he saw the baby on phone.

The lockdown prevented everyone from making any celebrations and visiting the baby in person; Sneha's parents too shared their excitement and blessings over phone.

In a week's time there was a lot of change in Sneha's attitude and perception towards the family. She became very amicable and welcoming. Everybody in the family felt much pleased and contented. They did not notice how days passed by.

The effect of Corona slowed down in the world as well as in their city at a snail's pace. That period of confinement brought about lot of changes in the

people's life style and mindsets at large. The enforced locking up in homes brought down all the differences among people and taught them the value of tolerance and togetherness. Everyone started understanding one another beyond all differences. Many families in the society came much closer and their bonding strengthened. Hygiene and sanitation, social and personal distancing, cutting down needless expenses, avoiding pompous living, contentment with the resources available and above all gratitude to the people who helped in emergency were the qualities that many people acquired or improved during the period. Exactly the same transformation took place in the family of Mr and Mrs Lakshmi. The over dominant Ganesh became more practical and down to earth. The pessimistic, suspicious and proud Sneha became a completely cordial and convivial person. Sneha's parents who had been prejudiced previously became congenial, sociable and open.

The baby was then three months old who was attracting the attention of everybody with her cute smiles and chubby looks; that was the day of her naming ceremony. Ganesh from California, Sneha's parents from Ampapuram were in Mr and Mrs Murthy's house. The house was decorated with various types of beautiful flowers and many colourful garlands under the thatch-leaved tent. There were mango leaves entwined like garlands that were decorated at main entrance and at every entrance of the house. There was lot of exhilaration and cheerfulness everywhere in the house. All the relatives and friends arrived. Sravya was busy receiving the guests and offering them tea or coffee or other soft drinks, snacks, etc, as per their

choices. Everyone was eagerly waiting for the name of the baby girl, which Sneha kept as a secret till the auspicious moment. She requested Ganesh to give her the chance of selecting and declaring the name of the little fairy princess.

When the Brahmin who was performing the ritual asked the parents to announce the name of the girl, Sneha revealed it as “Lakshmi Sravya,” which immediately brought shocking surprise to everyone; including Ganesh. A moment later all the friends and relatives as well as their family applauded and clapped expressing their contented approval. They all praised the choice of Sneha who stood up and explained the reason for choosing that name. She said, “I am really fortunate to have come into this family. Initially I was mistaken and could not understand them properly. I couldn’t even get any opportunity to be close to them. After I came here from California on health grounds, the care, responsibility, empathy, tolerance and forgiveness shown by both my in-laws and Sravya were unforgettable. For them Sravya and I were like two daughters. I was given necessary time and required space to make mistakes and learn from them. The sister-like affection that I received from Sravya, cautioning me and correcting me, arranging everything unasked, was something which I treasure for my life. Above all, the incessant vigilance and prompt action of my family in the critical times saved my life and my girl’s life. But for the physical absence of my parents, I did not feel their absence beyond that. Hence I feel immensely grateful to both my in-laws and my dear Sravya. I want them to be with me all through my life; wherever I am. I hope Ganesh too likes this.” Saying that she joined both her hands, went near her in-laws and was about to touch their feet for

blessings; but Lakshmi didn't let her do so, she embraced her and with tears in her eyes blessed her with all her heart. Murthy touched her on her head, patted on her back and blessed her with pride in his eyes.

Later Mr and Mrs Lakshmi decorated the baby girl with a diamond necklace and blessed their daughter-in-law with a diamond ring. Sravya gifted a pair of anklets to the little girl. Ganesh offered beautiful Kanchivaram Sarees to her mother and sister; and a lovely suit to his father.

After two months, when Ganesh and Sneha boarded the flight to California along with their little girl, sitting in her mother's lap, clapping her petty hand, little 'Lakshmi Sravya' made babbling sounds and moved her limbs joyfully as if she was very excited about the visit to California. Whenever she did like that the jingling sound of the anklets patted Sneha affectionately that brought a curve on her lips.

Glossary

Amma – Mother in Telugu Language

Attamma – Mother-in-law in Telugu Language

Vadina – Sister-in-law in Telugu Language

IIM-Kozhikode – The Indian Institute of Management, in the state of Kerala. It is the fifth one to be established among the 20 Indian Institutes of Management.

Eclampsia – It is the onset of seizures in a woman with pre-eclampsia. It is a disorder of pregnancy in which there is high blood pressure and either large amounts of protein in the urine or other organ dysfunction. It may happen before, during or after delivery.

4. The Invisible Enemy: An Unpredictable Attack

Ananya Banerjee, Burnpur Riverside School
Chittaranjan, West Bengal, India

“Covid-19 cases in India cross 70,000, 2500 deaths so far.”

“The covid-19 pandemic could cost over 25 million jobs.”

“Coronavirus lockdown takes toll on migrant workers.”

“Lockdown to extend.”

Riya switched off the television after listening to the flash news. Since morning this was the third time that she was listening the news. This has become her habit, to glue to the television for quite a few days, since the corona pandemic attack grew severer. She was looking quite dull and listless. Her mind was full of thoughts regarding the safety of her family. Specially she was perturbed about her only son Akash, who was still stuck in Bangalore. He is an MBA pass out from IIM Guwahati. Being a brilliant student, he cracked the first opportunity in the campus selection round. The salary was quite good for a middle-class family. He stays there in a rented 1 BHK flat with two other employees of the company. Due to the lockdown he has to stay there and continue with his work from home.

Savita was dusting the floor. Her face was wrapped completely with a dupatta. This was her mistress' order to her. Riya is very particular regarding

the hygiene of her family. She has instructed Savita to wrap her face with a dupatta while she is in her home. She even added that Savita must come and wash her hands and feet properly before starting with her household chores.

Savita, too was listening to the news on the television. She was musing on her own self, about the loss of job, of her husband, who was a daily wage construction worker. Since last week, Rabi, her husband was moving from shop to shop to get a job as a daily wage worker. But work is less in the market nowadays. Savita has three children- one son and two daughters. She gets only rupees 2000 in Riya's house for the household work. As part time, she also dusts the floor of an office, nearby. She used to get rupees 1000 for this. But now due to this pandemic that job is also gone. The office is closed for a few days and people are working from their home. She tried hard to convince the officer to give her the opportunity of dusting the floor, at least for a day in the week. At first the office people were not ready to hire her anymore, but later on with much request, they had accepted with a condition - she can dust the floor only for a day in a week and she would get rupees 250 a month for this. The vulnerable Savita accepted the condition as getting money during the lockdown is quite tough. She was feeling that if not due to corona but surely due to hunger they would die of.

“What is the matter Savita? Dust the floor quickly.”

“Ji Memsaab, I am doing it quickly.”

“Now a days you are always absent minded. Your work has also become very untidy.”

“Why Memsaab, I’m doing it properly... Actually, yesterday my husband...”

“Don't start your gossip Savita. I have a lot of work to do now. Do your work quickly and properly... I will listen to you later on.”

Savita started dusting the floor with much perfection.

“Ok Memsaab, I was just telling about...”

“In no time Sahib will be here from the market. Just hasten up with your work Savita. I told you I have a lot of things to do now.”

The doorbell rang. “See ...Sahib is back. It's so hot outside but he cannot sit under the fan just because you are still dusting.

Savita started dusting the floor quickly. Meanwhile Riya went forth to open the door.

Ajit, Riya’s husband, is a retired State Government employee. Though not very handsomely paid in his entire job life, yet, could lead the life congruously. He had spent much of his salary on Akash’s studies. The only dream of Ajit and Riya has always been Akash's future. Akash too, has turned

up to be an able son who had fulfilled the dream of his parents. Ajit gets a meagre pension now. The family expenditure is basically dependent on Aakash's salary.

"It's very hot outside today", Ajit entered the room with the mask in his hand and unbuttoning the first button of his shirt with the other hand.

"Yes, today it is. May be there would be a storm this evening, I have checked the weather forecast", Riya replied.

"The nature is perhaps happy to see us locked in our homes", smiled Ajit, "no pollution... no burden on the mother Earth."

"The weather too has changed drastically. It's almost middle of May, yet it's not as hot as it used to be till the last year."

"I feel nature is revolting against the ruthlessness of human beings," Ajit replied seriously.

Riya went to the kitchen to bring a glass of water for Ajit, while Ajit switched on the fan and started checking the Facebook notifications.

"Did you see the video that became viral on Facebook? It showed that peacocks are dancing on the streets, somewhere in Mumbai," Riya continued from the kitchen while filling in the glass of water.

Ajit smiled and replied back, “Even in North Bengal.... yesterday, Samaresh had sent me a picture of a tiger moving casually on the road near his house.”

“Is it so?” Riya came inside the room with a glass of water and asked, “Accha, what did you see in the market today? Are the people maintaining the social distance?”

“Na ...na...”, Ajit continued, “Though circles are drawn in front of every shop for people to stand there and maintain the social distance... Yet, they are all gathering at one place. Specially those bloody illiterate fools. Few are even not bothered to wear the mask. Just due to them this corona is spreading a lot. Police is also behaving leniently now.”

Savita was wiping the floor. She stopped her work as she heard about the police and corona spread. “Memsaab, do you know the incident of Kaveri apartment... my neighbour Sunita, works in a flat there. She was telling me that a doctor’s flat is there in that apartment, who is an employee of a government hospital and also treating corona patients now.”

“So is he affected with corona?” Riya inquired nervously.

“No Memsaab, I have heard... the members of the apartment were not allowing the doctor to enter his flat, as he is treating the corona patients.

Then there was much confrontation...finally police had to intervene and then the doctor could go to his flat.”

“These people are very mean minded”, Ajit replied while getting up from the sofa with the empty glass.

“Sunita was telling that the apartment people were afraid of the spread of corona through the doctor,” Savita added.

“It's true that safety is our primary concern but the doctors are the real fighters. We should treat them properly. We, the members of this society complex, are quite broad minded... Nirmala di, who is the nurse in the Kolkata government hospital is returning back today after 21 days.”

“O really! I had not seen her for many days. She is having a small baby also. Isn't it, Memsaab?”

“Yes, and the baby was crying all through these days. But it's good, finally she is returning back. At least the baby would get her mother now. We have planned to surprise her by welcoming her with a shower of flowers on her.”

“Wow that is quite good of you all, Memsaab”, Savita was quite contented to hear this.

“We are very broad minded ...and even people of this place know very well about our complex and about the residents of this complex... as we are known to be very kind hearted,” Riya replied with self-satisfaction.

'Zzzz....zzzzzz'.... The mobile buzzed and Riya went to take the call while Savita carried on with her work.

“Hello Shweta ...how are you?”

“I am fine Riya di.... you tell ...what is the corona report of your place?”

“Don't ask Shweta... things are getting worse day by day.”

“Yes, I know di.”

“What about your hospital? Are you going there every day or alternative days?”

“We have to go everyday ...we are helpless di.”

“Oh!!!But you are in the Out Patient department!”

“I am here so many patients are getting admitted every day... you can understand ...I have to be there, so, I am still going.”

“What's the status of corona there? Gradually this state is also rising in the number, with regard to corona affected patients, though lesser than the other states. I have heard in the news.”

“Let me tell you a secret news. The number of corona patients, that are been recorded here, are quite less. Actually, if properly checked, there will be rise in the number of patients. States are trying to hide the fact.”

“Yes, I have heard in the news headlines too, that there is a mismatch in death figures as hospitals are failing to send correct summary.”

“Everything is politics. Leave.... the thing is that we need to protect our self. We exactly don't know how many patients are roaming about, near us. By the way how is Ajit da?”

“He is fine. Just returned back from the market.”

“You're still sending him to the market!! Don't send him there now. I'll suggest you to avoid going to the market as well as not to allow anybody to come to your house. Not even the maid servants. They are also not safe.”

“But so much work!! You can understand Shweta... I am also getting aged and Ajit nowadays cannot do a single work. He is almost panting for breath after returning back from the market.”

“I understand everything but work will go on if you are alive. Don't allow your maid to enter from tomorrow. These people are moving to banks and ration shops. Anyways what about Akash? Is he still in Bangalore?”

“Yes Shweta. I am very worried about him. He is continuing his work from home. But he is staying alone in that foreign land. I cannot do anything being his mother.”

“Nothing to be done, Riya di. Situation is very tough for everybody. He has to do his work. I know that salary is important for your household.”

“You know everything about us, dear. Let's see what is to be done. Ok Shweta, will call you back later.”

Riya disconnected the phone but she was in deep thoughts. Shweta's words were ringing in her mind while she was cooking in the kitchen. She called Savita and said everything that Shweta had said to her.

Savita's face fell down after she heard it. She was almost thunder struck. She asked, “Memsaab, the salary that I get here is very significant for my household. Since morning I wanted to tell this. My husband has lost his job. He is searching here and there for a job, like a mad man. But there is no work in the market. My part time job is also not there. If you don't pay me, my family will die of hunger and on top of that the loans. Please Memsaab, think of us.” She fell at the feet of Riya and started crying.

Though Riya felt a bit touched yet, she rebuked her about her loans. She said that she had already asked her not to go for loans. She even accused their community saying, “These people are always overburdened with loans. Now you don’t have any money to buy food and on top of that you have to pay your loans.”

“Memsaab, water was dripping from the thatched roof of my house. So, I have to take loan to make a room with cement roof. This condition will arise who knows. Please Memsaab, let me do the work. You see I cover my face fully and wash hands and feet very often, as you have directed me.”

“But, don’t you move to the banks and ration shops? You can be a carrier of corona. Aren't you getting ration and money from the government?”

“I am getting, Memsaab, but with that... so many people in my family cannot subsist. I have heard that my brother-in-law, who works in another state as a labourer, would be returning back soon. He is walking all the way from Gujrat to Kolkata. Now he would also be jobless. How can we feed ourselves?” Savita was sitting at her feet and crying.

“Ok... as you know we are broad minded people... we cannot see somebody crying...so I will give you half of your salary. You see Akash is working hard, alone, in that foreign land. I cannot aimlessly spend all his hard-earned money.”

“I pray to god that he remains healthy forever. But Memsaab ...”

“Listen ...you are not doing any work but still I am paying you. We have such a good heart. Though we have to do all the work by our self but still I'll pay you half of your salary. It's enough that I can do for you, Savita.”

“Thanks for your generosity, Memsaab. Our days will be harder but still if needed please call me anytime. I'll come and do the work.”

“If I call you be present at that time. See I am favouring you, so, you should also think of us and be present here in times of crisis, in case I need you.”

“Sure Memsaab.”

Savita's face was looking helpless and red under the torturing hot sun when she was returning back. She was jobless, overburdened with loan and a helpless mother who knows that her children would have to starve. Still she was thankful for the favour that her mistress had bestowed upon her. She was thinking that with the partial payment of her salary, at least her children can get food, though half a stomach.

It was a dark cloudy evening. Outside, there was thunder and lightning. Riya was in deep thought, while the tea was almost ready on the gas oven. Right

from the morning she didn't get any call from Akash. On other days by evening, Akash would call almost seven times from the morning.

Riya came to Ajit with two cups of tea on a tray.

"Did you get a call from Aakash since morning," Ajit inquired Riya.

"No, I am also tensed about that. First, I thought he might be busy, but, its evening still he didn't call. See the weather outside, it seems as if something bad is going to happen. I don't know but my mind is boding something ill."

"Wait I am calling him," Ajit connected Aakash twice. The phone rang but nobody received the call on the other end. Ajit was feeling irritated and nervous at the same time. Finally, on the third attempt he handed over the phone to Riya when the caller tune on the other side could be heard of.

"Hello baba," a very grave voice could be heard of from the other end.

"It's ma here, dear. What has happened to you? You sound so serious. You didn't call since morning. We are getting aged, sona. Please call at least for once. We feel worried about you. Don't you know that beta?"

"I am a bit depressed ma and I am also not feeling well."

"What happened Akash? Are you sick? Riya felt a tinge of nervousness again.

“No ma. Nothing severe...I’m just sad, too sad.”

“I can understand beta. In this situation you are away from home. I know you are missing us. We too are missing you, beta.”

“Yes, I am badly missing you both, too much today.”

“Akash. you know ...Shweta Masi rang me today. She was asking about you. She said me to be very protective in this situation as we don't know who can be Covid-19 positive here. That's why I just said Savita to stop the work. She is also not safe for us you know.”

“Oh!! Ma, you shouldn't have done this.”

“But you see your mother is not at all cheap. We will pay her rupees 1000 without doing any work. After all it's the matter of your hard-earned money.”

“What will happen just with that thousand rupees. She has such a big family to feed.”

“Akash is something wrong with you? What happened beta? Won't you share with your ma.”

“Ma... Due to the economic depression... my company is sacking many high paid employees... and,” Akash couldn’t complete the sentence. His throat seemed to be choked up.”

“Akash...beta...are you crying? Tell me what has happened? I can’t get you beta.”

“Ma ...my company is sacking many high paid employees... and my name is there on the list.”

A gust of wind suddenly opened the window. Big drops of rain through the open window began to enter the room. The rain-soaked wind whipping through the curtains circled around Riya as if whispering a thousand words of guilt, inhumanity, pain and repentance.

5. Discover yourself: A tale of covid-19 days

S. Sajeer, ST. Joseph's College

Tamil Nadu, Trichy, India

I knew a man who lived in one of the hottest places of Tamil Nadu. He didn't choose to be in the hottest place but he had no choice. He had been posted in Trichy for being a teacher in a college. Though he enjoyed the profession, he did not enjoy his routine life, he wanted to be at home every now then. But the society where he lived in, he had to work especially being a male. He used to lament that he had been subjugated, dominated and suppressed by the gender norms. He knew that the subjugation was set up by a male dominated society. But, even being a male, he couldn't liberate himself from the misery of the boredom, emptiness and mundane life. He had to breathe within the frame of society's freedom.

He dreamed to be a cook at home, home maker and baby sitter at home. He knew that he had to oblige the rules and expectation of the society. He had to behave like a male as going to a job, earning and fulfilling the dreams of other men. But, he always felt that that was not him, there was something missing in his life. He always wanted to find himself. He felt this was the subjugation set up the male dominated society.

He is named as Karihaalan by his parents and called Kari by friends, and students. Yes, Kari was his unofficial name of him. He genuinely accepted being called as Kari, as he believed there was a love when he was

called up so. Whenever he met new people or a bunch of new students, obviously he had to explain his name. He had to say that he never had any connection with the historical figure. He used to clarify himself that he was named after the language likeness, to be named as Tamil name. He often wanted to hit the roads. He used to go long drive on the empty roads, he often irritated to pick up the short cuts and on the messy roads. He preferred Chennai by-pass and Madurai by-pass where he could hit the road in a couple of minutes. But Covid-19 stopped his relaxation, his hobbies, his joy and more over his empty roads. Hitting the road was the second option to him, the first option was to him that being home all the time, cooking the favourite fish gravy, and dry fish gravy. But, his routine life was disturbed, he had to prepare for the next day of his college.

He badly needed an end for his monotonous life. He got to go college by driving on the messy roads and hitting the hard sun in the afternoon while returning home. As being a teacher, the initial time of COVID-19 was a mixed reaction to him. When he learned that the college was going to be shut down, immediately he felt relieved from the tedious routine and mundane life. But his happiness lasted only for a while, he was called for the duty that was, “to sign the attendance register”. He wasn’t assigned any work for a couple of days. Along with other professors, he also stayed in the department without any role to play. They just discussed the new virus for the hours. But after a couple of hours, they felt normal and started bullying each other. Most of the normal routine working days, they never had that much free time and for the general talks. Only the lockdown for the students made them be in the department for an unusual task. The only lockdown

closure of college for the students went on for a few days. After a point of time, he was very curious and disturbed about the fact that the teachers weren't cared for and asked to come to the college with no purpose. Afterward, the teachers were also asked to be at home by the UGC but they didn't get any communication from the local Joint Directorate of Collegiate of Education. The college management and he waited for the e-mail communication to reach the college. Finally, it had reached the college management and asked them to be at home. He felt happy and relaxed.

After the lockdown, his usage of the smartphone had increased and most of the time was spent browsing COVID-19 news. He felt that wearing a mask to the face was no more useful than wearing the mask to the ears. If he wore the mask to the ears that would protect him from hearing the same news again and again. At a point of time, his head filled with only the news and worried a lot. Even he worried about the fact that, by listening to the COVID-19 news would make him be normal and no sensitization towards the COVID-19 news. Once the impact of COVID-19 made changes in his life, he pumped up to see the breaking news in the news channel. At last, he also discovered that his heart also was broken, his BP was also increased just like that. The news channels started to stop telecasting normal news and the breaking news had become the normal news. While listening to the breaking news, he didn't deny the fact of suffering people, but he worried about listening to the news would make the sane people insane. His fear didn't go in vain, he stopped watching the news a lot and he decided to spend watching news only for an hour. This allowed to be sensitive as well as being aware of what was happening in the outer world. As his mobile phone and

himself were inseparable, one day, he unknowingly touched an icon to activate a caller tune of his Bodafone network and lost Rs. 90 at the wink of an eye. He got furious and irritated by the network because of corporate, digital, tricky, and official stealing. He also just checked whether he was chosen a song. Yes, he was chosen by the company. It wouldn't hurt him, if it was before the arrival of Bio. Before the arrival, spending Rs.90 as usual but after the arrival in almost all the call charges, SMS and data pack had become one like post-prepaid connection. The modern version of the post-prepaid connection. Because of Pio's post-prepaid connection, his balance would be the same for almost many days as outgoing and data are charged within the select plan. The Pio had made even the other service providers to be like Pio and made them go for Post-prepaid plans. As being a regular customer for almost 15 years, his Bodafone network also started to learn the business rules from the giant Pio. The learning resulted in providing new services like stealing money from the customers.

The chosen song was not even in his native tongue or in English. As he did not know any other language, the Hindi song made him remember the Hindi imposition in Tamil Nadu. He thought they had new routes to reach them, colonize them, and sent the reminder that Hindi was the unofficial official language in India. He called the customer care for clarification but all of the questions became the answers. So, out of frustration he disconnected the customer care line and came to know that the song would play for another 90 days. If he wanted to change the song he could. So, he tried to change the song but it was like a promotion for Bodafone Company. The more he searched about the Bodafone caller tune, the more he learned about

the company. Yes, it's a tricky promotion for the company at the customer's expense. So, he browsed the details on the internet and learned to install a caller tune app for Bodafone. He installed with irritation as he wasn't interested to install any app for security reasons. But, he wouldn't want to lose his Rs. 90 to the company's expenses during the COVID-19. So, he installed the app and selected the song from the movie 'Kaatru veliyidai', a song called 'Azhagiye'. After the song activation, he just popped up to listen to the song and immediately made a call from his mom's phone to know how it would play on his mobile phone. You know, what song he had just heard. He asked other people to call somebody and carefully listen. He said, "whether you have activated particular a movie song or not, you will listen the song of the government, go ahead just listen and come back". He just laughed and laughed, thinking about how fool he was, how helpless he was. In the end, he lost his money, his song, the trust on his network, and more importantly his peace of mind. He thought, wasn't the stealing of the worst of the time and the best of the time? Was it a matter of just Rs. 90 only to him? Wasn't it happening to others? Weren't they stealing from everyone's pocket? Why did they have a caller tune when the COVID-19 instruction playing? Wasn't the fault of the government to stop the caller tune services when the government instruction playing? What was important whether the business of the corporates or the welfare of the people?

He used to go to college at 8:15 am, so he would get up from 7 to 7:30 am which would make him be on a regular schedule. That was, taking breakfast before 9 am, lunch at 2:30 pm, and dinner at 10 pm. Sleeping was at 11:30 to 12 am. But his entire schedule just moved like the sun displaces one

place to the other. After a week, he started to sleep at 7 a.m. and be awake at night. He had no schedules or routine life which was the dream of him for a long. He dreamed like Shakespeare and Christopher Columbus to discover his life, to be at home without schedules. He knew that, he was given that break by COVID-19. After a week's past, he noticed something unusual and interesting at his home. Before going to bed at 9 a.m., mother used to get up at 6:30 a.m. to see a TV horoscope at ZEE Tamil, a program called '*Olimayamana Edhirkalam*' which meant bright future, anchored by Harikesanallur Venkatraman. One could view his horoscopes' prediction by clicking here: <https://www.harikesanallurvenkatraman.com/>. He knew, she would watch the horoscope in the morning without fail. But he also happened to be watching along with his mother. That was the most important moment of the day as the laughing and happiness stay for a while but think about the laughing for the rest of the day and could be a reminiscence for the rest of the years to come. To his utmost shock, the horoscope man spoke as usual without any impact on his life. He said, "This day will be the best day for the 'Aries' people. Those who do business will get salary increment, those who are waiting for the marriage, their marriages will be fixed and money will come from all corners". That made his day. He laughed sarcastically. He knew his mother was offended but what he would do. He just laughed sarcastically. His mother did watch not only her horoscope but also his too. She did watch the entire family members as well as known people's horoscopes. He wondered that, what to say on this, being a Christian family, his mother used to watch the horoscopes. Though many astrologers predicted on screen, his mother was so obsessed with

Harikesanallur Venkatraman's horoscope. He amused his mother by saying, if they could predict the future, they could've predicted the COVID-19. If they were true, they should have stopped at least for the lockdown period. To his belief, he heard that the viewers remained the same and demanded the show to run. Who to be blamed the astrologer or the public? People wanted to predict their future to tackle their problems in the future. He questioned his mother that were they living in reality? He used to say to his mother that what we gave it to god, god wasn't ready to give it back to people. He also gave an example of Tirupathi temple Board who had recently announced the termination of employees, citing the money loss due to COVID-19. His mother pounced on him and said, "it was because of the people who worked there, they were the ones to be blamed, not the God". Kari gave another example of Trivandrum temple's wealth. The list and the argument went on for a while.

The COVID-19 made him understand his family and be with his family for hours. As he spoke to his mother as much he could, as much time he could spend. He used to talk to his parents whenever he needed something and whenever he was bored. He didn't realize before the lockdown he was squeezing his parents' time. He didn't know that he was using them, didn't know they worked and lived for him. After the week past, he could understand them as they spent their life for him.

Before the lockdown, whenever he was asked for the support or to do errand service, he excused himself by saying, "I need to study". His parents used to say, "stop your studies, you've been studying for many years". After listening to that he knew, he was excused. Being at home, being a boy, he

never did any household works before. Because of boredom, because of being at home, he volunteered to do household works. Even he chopped onions with watery eyes, even he cleaned his toilet and swept the floors with dust behind. Though it wasn't a shock for him, it was a great shock to his parents. Being a bachelor, without hitting the gym, he knew he would put on weights. So, he decided to take part in the household works which made his belly stop from protruding. At one point in time, even he felt of having mask-wearing at home, by the way, it was not to stop protecting from the virus but to protect from the habit of the excess of eating, especially for the junk foods.

As he had an aversion towards technology, he never encouraged himself to do more computer works. Before the lockdown, he heavily relied on his friends or to any of his friends for any technical support. But, due to a lot of free time, he decided to update himself on computer technical skills and started to use more YouTube tutorials to learn new nuances of technical skills. To his surprise, hard work never failed, he successfully designed a course online and conducted one for 'free of cost'. Until before the COVID-19, he felt studying and learning were tedious tasks. But after the lockdown he learned and work with given freedom makes one self-reliant and happier in learning. Yes, many claimed COVID-19 was "freedom but corona" but for him, it was just the opposite, "Corona but freedom". He still remembered the days when he called his student for any technical help even for just creating an account. Many of his students were cordial enough to assist him, at least for the face value.

During the lockdown, his teaching never stopped. He was asked to teach English to the most important people in his life. That's for his parents. He was shocked and didn't know that even they could learn at the age of sixty, especially to his mother. Because of smartphones, his mother wanted to open a Facebook account and wanted to update WhatsApp status every day. As he taught them technical skills along with English language skills. He sent them a message, then they would reply the same or they were asked to reply to the message. To his surprise, they did happily and somewhat with good text. He felt like, he missed all those things before the lockdown. Before the lockdown, he had the opinion that his mother could give a lecture on cine stars and their life at present, especially 80s cine stars. He did not mean that she wasn't aware of the present cine stars, she did know more than him. Even he used to pull her legs by saying, "Why don't you give a lecture on cine stars' past and present life". It wasn't just for the bullying's sake, but that was the fact too. If he had the chance of discussing cine stars' life in his college, definitely he would invite her as a guest lecturer. That's how she had a vast knowledge of cine stars' life and worried about the disappearance of cine stars in the present life. She worried that Revathi looked older but not Nadhia. She said, "Radhika has done something to her face to retain bouncy cheeks". She used to say whether Mohan's movie hit or not but his songs were and are a superb and great hit. The list went on like anything. The COVID-19 made him realize what really important in his life, 'discovering the relationship'. Before the lockdown, he used to purchase the snacks outside, especially Mixtures, *Murukku*, Chips, and so on. After the lockdown, he badly in need of snacks as the shops were closed. His parents

were cooking something which he didn't aware of. They gave him mixtures, he liked that one and asked how and where they did get this one. He felt that was too good. To his surprise, they cooked themselves. At the age of 34, he never knew his mother would know to cook mixtures at home. He had a shocking and surprised look on them. The COVID-19 made not only to open himself but was also on his parents too. The bonding and understating in the family grew well as never before.

As an English teacher, he used to speak at least five hours per day. It could be three hours among the students and two hours among the members of the staff. But after the lockdown, his talking was limited only to updating his intrapersonal skills rather than the interpersonal skills. As he talked to himself, most of the time, he could elucidate what he needed and what he lacked. Self-discovering was like discovering the anatomy of a plant. The lockdown made him watch nearly a hundred films. At a point in time, two movies per day. Sometimes movies helped him to reduce the boredom and sometimes increased his boredom. It was like, what he did to others was not a matter of concern, but what he did to himself counts a lot. He didn't know how long the lockdown extend but locking down to himself would continue forever. The COVID-19 made the male dominated society to be at check, it made no gender disparity. It made a male Karihaalan to be at home as he wished. At last, because of COVID-19, he felt, he wasn't suppressed, marginalized and moreover DISCOVERED HIMSELF!

6. A Slight Journey with COVID Pandemic

Sabari Prakash Prabhu, Best Senior Secondary School [CBSE],
Paloor, Karungal, India

I was a bit nervous to stroll outside after the government's announcement about lockdown. It was a soliloquy

"Do I need to go out?"

It is essential and significant for my family to buy groceries for this month. Unknowingly, I started, to crack my knuckles. A severe popping sound and my wife's tapping on my shoulder brought me to the reality.

"Shall we go my dear? – my wife raised her eyebrows."

"Have you taken the declaration form? - I reminded her."

Somehow, I was managed to borrow a scooter of my cousin brother.

"Phew! As early as possible we should get our scooter from the workshop"

I gazed on her leaving a disclaiming mark.

Though we had seen the people wearing mask, it was a new experience for us. With a raised pulse rate, I ignition the scooter and my better-half was sitting at pillion.

"Acha... Acha*... I want potato chips of any flavour."*

"Acha... I need only Spanish Tomato Flavour"* my two boys from the balcony gave their choices innocently without knowing the seriousness of the situation.

With a messed and missed smile I looked at them.

The scooter was piercing the thin air in the hilly area. Not only had we felt lonely in the forest but also the sound of the scooter.

There was no check points so far. With a slight relaxation, I rode the scooter in the busy business street. I am sorry, it is now deserted.

“I feel Scary and unpleasant” – my wife mumbled at my ears.

Even though it was a hostile atmosphere, still my mind sensed rejoice when I saw the deserted roads and streets emitted mirage on the earth.

Adding fuel to the fire of unfriendly nature, even the domestic animals in the street were running along with the scooter with expectations to munch to quench its hunger.

Bow... Bow... Bow... the sound of the barking dog with drooping saliva which automatically increased the acceleration of the scooter.

Even though my pulse rate got pumped up, I still rode the scooter without any hindrance. Abruptly, my wife shouted....

“Slow down the scooter, we had crossed the shop.”

A sudden creeping sound of brake disturbed the dog. It stopped and ran to the other side.

Only one shutter was opened in the shop out of four. We were instructed to maintain social distance from each other. Nodding the head, we started collecting the necessary things from the shelves.

At the same time, the sudden formation of dark clouds started to spill water drops on the glass partition which was at the entrance of the shop. I kept one sack full of things at the luggage space of the scooter and the other one at the lap of my wife.

The drizzling weather was chilling and reducing our body temperature. I was told a day before by someone that the policemen were a bit harsh with the public. I thought we were lucky that we couldn't find any policeman in the street. But our happiness didn't last long. A strong thick hand waved at one corner of the street. I stopped. We both were looking at the policeman with our two twin fish eyes expecting his question.

"Where are you going?" – the policeman asked.

"Ssssirrr from Pakkode." – I blethered.

The policeman was staring after hearing my inappropriate reply.

"No Sir, we are going to the pharmacy." – my wife interrupted.

Actually, moving to the pharmacy was our next plan.

"Don't you have any other pharmacy near your residence?" – once again the policeman interrogated.

"No Sir" – we replied simultaneously.

I was happy and raised thumbs up in the mind after answering correctly.

"Go... Go... finish the work quickly and be home before dusk." – the roaring policeman's voice nailed our sense.

Health workers in the street squeezed a few drops of sanitizer at our palms and taught to maintain cleanliness to fight against COVID Pandemic.

"Thanks a lot." – we replied.

Drizzling drops were getting a little heavier. As my helmet prevented, my wife felt prickling effect of the shower on her face which forced her to pinch on my hand.

"I yelled, Okay! Okay! I will reduce the speed."

Somehow, we managed to reach our residence before the heavy downpour. But in next five minutes, the vigorous nature started showing its arrogant face which flattened twelve Plantains, six Alpasi trees in addition a fifteen year old rubber tree got uprooted and demolished the car porch in my neighbour's house. Meanwhile, the complete blackout supported and decorated the dark nature with high voltage lightening and heavy thunders. We were watching depressed nature through the glass window. Slowly, I opened the big shopper bag and took two potato chips packets.

No reaction on the face of my kids.

And then I just oscillated the packs in front of my kids.

"Move Acha, we want to see the waving trees."* – my second son shouted out of curiosity.

I understood the impact of the nature once again. We feel to have Hot Tea and Vada* during the pouring weather; likewise, we take Chilled Juice in hot summer. In many occasions, the weather decides the destiny of the human kingdom. Even now, the COVID Pandemic and Stormy Nature simultaneously planned something severe.

By looking at the nature with stunning eyes, my first son scratched me and asked....

"Are the temples open?"

"No" – I replied.

"Churches and Mosques....?"

I nodded horizontally and I said...

"Major beliefs are tied."

I think the doom's day is yet to enact on the stage of people's life. Even though the pandemic face of God balancing the world population still "HE" in disguise in the name of Medical Doctors, Nurses, Health Workers, Volunteers, Policemen etc., trying to save the life of good humans on the earth.

I advised my sons....,

"Each and everything has a beginning and an end. The notorious Corona Virus will vanish one day. Right now, 'Staying Home and Maintaining Social Distance' are the only solutions to live a long healthy life."

Glossary

***Acha** – a traditional way of calling father in malayalam language**

***Vada** - an eatable made of Bengal Gram Dal.**

7. Into the Blue Sky

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Rita swiped off the droplets of sweat gathering around her face mask and looked at her watch – 9.45 pm. *What did Sanvi do? Is she all alone? Did she eat dinner?* These questions plagued her through her already busy 24/7 schedule. The man on the gurney looked pretty dead. There was no saving him from those wheezing coughs and renal failure. His legs were swollen to an extent that made her sick just by looking at them. Her mind spun around to the time her father was affected. That was a long time ago...Now to the task at hand. Dr. Rajesh called her over to assist him with endotracheal intubation. This was a high risk. There were already 300 people affected in their hospital alone and Rita had been called in as substitute nurse. But it was her duty. She had sworn in to save the diseased and dying. She did what was expected of her. She came out exhausted and went into the locker room to get changed. This was the 167th patient for that day. The big clock in the locker room announced the time rather sternly. 10.30 pm. Rita rode her bike and reached home fifteen minutes later than usual because of the police checks and questions.

Sanvi was fast asleep on the sofa. The TV was buzzing with hand-wash commercials and anti-capitalist slogans. The door was not even locked. The dinner remained in the refrigerator – cold like the heart of the mother who

prepared it with every effort and longed to be with her child. Sanvi was 9 and quite mature for her age. She had grown up without any childhood around a single mother and never knew her father. She had seen her mother cry sometimes but never asked anything about her father. Rita did not touch her child. She went straight to the shower. After coming out, she took her daughter back to her bed and ate the cold dinner without heating it up. The phone rang at 2.00 am. “Come immediately to the hospital. We have an emergency!” bleared the voice of Abi, her colleague and best friend. “Another 3 patients. All of them need ventilation. They have been shifted from the village primary health care centre.” Rita locked her house and gave the key to her neighbour. She left immediately.

Dr. Rajesh was doing his best. The patient with the swollen legs was dead. He was simply wrapped up in a plastic sheet and taken for incineration. They had run out of body bags a long while ago. There were no funeral rites or last words or prayers for those touched by a deadly virus. All the relatives got was an urn of ash. Just an ordinary plastic urn for all the beauties life has to offer. Dr. Rajesh was ventilating the third patient who was choking. Rita looked at his contorted face. His eyes riveted back and he was drooling. His face was contorted and his writhed around. All her experience had taught Rita one thing – there was nothing beautiful or heroic about death. There was suffering all along and then more. Dr. Rajesh had been in for a week. He was celebrated a hero in the hospital but nobody wanted him back home. Nobody wanted to die. “Come back when the virus is gone,” his wife had said. Abi was standing right by his side. She beckoned to Rita. There was no time to smile.

All of them died. There was no cure. It was horrible. Rita and her friends were on a race against death. Death always won. "You should go home. Take the next day off. Abi and I will be here," said Dr. Rajesh. He was a kind man and had a great life before the epidemic. Rita came home and went straight to the shower. Something was irritating her throat. She made some lemon tea. It was 7.00 am and Sanvi was awake.

"Momma, I'm going to watch cartoons all day," she came running to Rita.

"Yes, but don't forget breakfast. Common, let's eat first." She had already made idlis and coconut chutney. Sanvi rarely ate hot food these days. So this was special. *My daughter is so beautiful. I will make sure she becomes a doc...no, no, she would do nicely as a teacher or an accountant.* Her dreams for her child had changed.

"Time for your bath now"...Once Sanvi was changed, Rita's throat was getting worse. She couldn't speak by the time Sanvi was making paper planes. Rita took her temperature. She had a light fever. "Sanvi don't come near me. Stay in the bedroom. I'm going to the hospital," she said.

"Mom, but you said you'd play with me today," Sanvi began crying.

"Ye..s, dea..r. Mom..ma has to go. It's an em..ergen..cy," she said, her voice breaking.

"At least give me a kiss," Sanvi came and held up her hands.

"No, I can't dar..ling," Rita's tears were visible now.

"Why, mummy?" Sanvi cried.

"I pro..mise we will play in the eve..ning," she ran out without the courage to look at her daughter's tear-drenched face. Her tears were falling unchecked. She went straight to the emergency section.

“Oh, no! It’s Rita” said Dr. Rajesh. He knew at a glance. Abi came running.

“Take care of my daughter please,” Rita said to Abi through the impenetrable barrier of her mask.

“I’m sorry Rita. But Sanvi has to be screened also,” Abi told her rather coldly. There was no friendliness in her voice. This was how the dying felt then.

Sanvi was brought screaming. She was held in another room. Isolated beyond grief. Separated from family. Bound. Lost. Confused. Death hovering over. It was all black and grey for Rita as they put her through quarantine procedures. “My daughter, my child, Sanvi” was all she said again and again. “My daughter, my child, my life...” Rita felt no pain. Her body was isolated from her mind. All she could hear was her child crying for her two floors above in the children’s section.

“I hate to break it to you...” Dr. Rajesh said when he saw her three days later after the blood work came in. Rita was prepared for the worst.

“I don’t care. I’m prepared to die. Just take care...” her face fell when Dr. Rajesh showed her the reports. Rita’s throat irritation was nothing but a common cold. But Sanvi’s file was different.

“Why is Sanvi’s report in the red file, sir?” Rita asked. She knew but she asked. She knew beyond doubt. She knew what that red folder meant. Red. The colour of blood and the colour of life. Why was it around her daughter’s life?

“You know what it means Rita. She’s positive,” Rita swooned. She had to be helped up. Abi was beside her when she was up. “I’m so sorry. Sanvi had carried the virus for more than ten days,” she said. The world was blank. The universe was cruel indeed. First her father, now her daughter.

“I need to see her,” Rita said.

“That can’t be arranged. I will do my best to get you nearest to her as possible,” Dr. Rajesh said. He talked of Sanvi as though she was a monster. As promised, he came later that evening and took her to the children’s ward. There were glass cubicles surrounded by pink curtains. The curtains had pictures of cartoon characters as though that made life any beautiful. Little plastic bags, the size of duffel bags, were laid out by an attendant. They looked ominous as they were lined up on a trolley and rolled around to the incinerator. Some cubicles were being sanitized with chlorine and an awful smell wafted around. Sanvi was in one of the cubicles.

“Momma,” Sanvi ran around but the cubicle was locked and sealed. A nurse in a HAZMAT suit stood inside watching over her like a guard. Sanvi was not sick at all. She was playing around the cubicle. “Look momma, I got the room with the Chota Bheem curtains!,” she said playfully. Mother and daughter talked through the sealed room every day.

After a week, Rita was at home and she woke up on a beautiful day. The weather was perfect. *Sanvi would love to go and look for butterflies*, she thought. “Rita, I feel so bad that I’m the one to give people the bad news always,” said Dr. Rajesh on the phone. When Rita reached the hospital, Abi was there too. She knew it was bad. Something had happened. They were in their ‘grave suits’ as the HAZMATs were called.

Cold sweat ran down her legs as she ran to the children’s ward. But it was too late. She felt glad she wasn’t there when it happened. Death had been ‘gentle’ as the nurse said. A plastic bag was brought around. All she saw was a bundle of life wrapped in it. She wasn’t allowed to touch or go near it.

The last sight she got was a head of beautiful hair rolled into plastic and placed in the trolley. There was nothing left. All the toys, books and clothes of her child were also to be burnt. Memories gone forever. Rita dropped on the cold floor and hoped she was dead. But life would not spare her that luxury.

A day passed by. Slowly. The hours were long now that there was no sweetness left at home to return to. Nobody to play with anymore. Rita couldn't keep her promise. *How I wished I had kissed her that day...* that thought wouldn't go out. She returned back to the hospital. She was a nurse and that was where she belonged. "Can I speak to you for a minute?" Dr. Rajesh stepped in.

"What is it" she asked carelessly.

"I know this is not the perfect time but I had some time to study your blood work in detail. It seems you are immune to the virus," he said in a low voice.

"But you said I had a common cold," she was shocked.

"I thought so too. But the virus had left your body weeks ago. There were no symptoms. You are immune," he said.

"So what? I couldn't save my child," she gasped.

"You could save others," he said. He showed her the reports he had written. He had even got permission to work in the nearest B4-Lab. A vaccine. But Rita was the prime ingredient.

"Do what it takes. I'll give every drop of blood in my body so a mother should never see her child die again," said Rita.

It was a beautiful day. Birds were flying around a clear blue sky. Sanvi would have loved running around the park on that day. But a lonely mother

waited under a tree. A car drove up the dusty road. She climbed in. “Where are we going?” she asked Dr. Rajesh. “A long way,” he said. They drove off into the sunshine ready to battle against death. And Rita was sure this time they would win.

8. CORONA – The Game Changer

Cibi T R, Kongu College of Arts and Science

Karur, Tamil Nadu, India

The shining sharp crepuscular rays through the window slap the cheeks partially as the remaining body is inside the bedsheet like a snail. After a long gap, it is the time to get up and ready for the Clinic, College, School, etc...,

“Maaaaa..... where is the tooth paste?”

Ramppo, the younger brother of Campo shouts.

“There... search keenly Ramm!!”

Mom Riya shouts in turn.

“Mom, mom, please... please only five more minutes, not more than that.... please let me sleep for five more minutes alone”, says Campo begs and tightly holds the bedsheet from his mother.

“ Don't be a couch potato, this is your first day to College after the disastrous pandemic. Get up...get up...” Riya urges.

“Where is my coat, dear?” a voice of her fluffy husband Richard, makes Riya tense.

“ Open your eyes given by God to witness the stuffs! You have to consult your friend, Eye specialist, Doctor Kannan. huff...here it is.. don't trouble me by asking these kind of queries without letting your eye balls to see. I want to make Ramppo to get ready for his school and Campo to College.”

Riya murmurs in the kitchen holding the knife in hand and also Riya makes her work fulfil for the morning shift.

The cry of the honk recreated the feel of the pre-covid-19 days. Even though in the malls and Bazar are filled with people but in the streets they are maintaining social distance still.

Generally he hates to travel 3 kilometres by vehicle to reach the place of his work/service destination. So he uses “Nataraja service” (by the walk).

Please move is the frequent phrase of Richard. Which he hasn't uttered as he is walking in the aware society.

“Hungry.... alas... hungry...please help me!!” a voice interrupted in his happiness.

Suddenly the gentle- hearted Richard buys food for the breakfast from the nearby ‘Karunai Hotel’ and offers breakfast to that boy.

“My young boy, where is your parents? whether they went to collect some food?” The soft voice of Richard asks with pity.

“Right now I am a unlucky boy. I missed the chance to accompany my mom and dad for the permanent visit to heaven.” Says that boy. That boy's strength less shivering reply makes the sweat drops of the fluffy Richard to kiss the earth.

“I am so sorry when? how my boy?”

Richard says.

“My father was an old worker in the department of cleanliness who used to clean the streets and the Corporation dustbins more than 12 hours per day”

Says that boy and hiccups.

“ slowly..... drink some water” says the sad fluffy ball and pats him on the back.

“ My Dad don't have the habit of smoking or drinking alcohol or any other stuffs relating to this. But due to his work right from the age of thirty he had been affected by lung cancer. I could say proudly that he was a cancer surveyor. And in spite of this disease he continued his service. Last month after the lockdown relaxation, himself tested and confirmed positive for Corona. Panel of doctors struggled a lot but couldn't rescue him. The last words uttered by him are ‘I have served for this Nation, my dear. My chapter is approaching the deadline. But every end has a new beginning.. so this is your turn my boy. My only son....not like me but more than me, you should serve our country. But I couldn't do it as I am comfortable and hitting the hay to consume the death.

This life is not short as people says. But this life is too long for the people like us, my son. You should become a doctor to make the lives of the fellow patients even more longer. But I am unable to let you do it with full financial support. Why God! please let me to handover my boy to any of the good hearted souls..... I will come there after this’ , that's all... my dad drunk the death.

After hearing this news my mother.... my mother had a heart attack and pushed up the daisies.” Says the boy whispers.

Richard listened and nodded with pain. Makes an admission in an orphanage and makes his mind to look after him.

“well done my hubby. Love you...you have done a satisfactory job.”

Riya says while Richard narrates all the things after returning from the clinic at mid-night lying in the bed.

“In fact I am a doctor who tried a lot to save the life of Paneer, scavenger, the father of the boy I have mentioned. But I couldn't. At least let us fulfil the dream of the dead soul” Richard takes the tissue and consoled himself.

“You my sweetheart... That is well ... let us sleep! Tomorrow is parents-teachers meeting in

Ramppo's school as they have informed us before the reopening of the school.”

Riya informs and hits the hay at once.

“meeting...meeting...shall I want to postpone the deans meeting in the clinic tomorrow?!” He puzzles within his mind.

All sudden, Richard realized that it was dream and continued to treat the patients without rest.

It is 30th May, 2020 where the entire nation is looking for the Central Government's Announcement regarding general Lock-down.

When, Richard's rich mobile rings. He sweeps his eye and treats the patients.

There Riya is very much offended and throws her I-Phone in the sofa.

Ramppo then decides to make a conference call

“Thinking, Nimmi, Can you hear me?”, Ramppo merges the call.

“Yes, We can”, Nimmi answers.

“How is your Lockdown life? I am here it is not at all good! I am missing our dad badly,” Ramppo shared those sad stuffs.

“Oh! Really bad! But your father is one of the good’s incarnation. Because he has cured 17 covid-19 patients. So be proud of your dad.” Tinku consoles him.

“Absolutely you are correct Tinku. What a wealthy mind in the pot of head full of mud”, kidding Nimmi agrees.

“Hey, Flower pot! Just calm....” Tinku reacts with laughter.

“Yes my people now you both share your experience in this lock down.” Ramppo says.

“Nimmi, you first share your village life. It will sound interesting too”, Tinku says.

“Guys I think I am really blessed to be here at this course of time. This is a rural village which I used to visit not very often but seldom visit my ancestral house and land only during my vacation. But after spending more than 50 days here, I feel this is the land where God used to rest and play before the birth of this dangerous human Monsters,

Huge body of spongy parts floats,

With drizzling drops of nature's squads.

Yeah! Clouds begin to pour,

After the hilarious hatching of sun in the earth's core!

Amusing bird behaves as a beautiful bride,

To enjoy the moment of it’s life's side.

Dung is beauty in the nature's sight!

Than the look of massive flight.

**With the rays of crepuscule view,
Nectar breeze that slowly blew!
Rapturous blossoms in the fragrance bed,
Surrounded by the garden's wood!
Lonely nights keenly search,
The heavenly sight of the moon with crunch.
Along the cattle's staunchly kiss!
I just mesmerised to express my reply with bliss**

And the entire village is surrounded by the green carpet (ie. fields). With this pure breeze, I would like to linger in the lap of this nation's splendidly rapturous place.

We wake up sharply at 5 o' clock in the morning and take up the field work from 6 o' clock. Our Granny's Grant Commission brings the rice in the huge pot with Green chilli as side dish. I personally thought, what a life! we have missed earlier. And now I am happy with my Parent, Brothers, Sisters, Aunts, Uncles, Nephews, Nieces and Grand Parents. We play 'Pallanguli', 'Dhayam', 'Paramapadham'(Snake and Ladder), and so on...

So, precisely I am happy here with my join family!", Nimmi happily shares everything.

"Wow, What a beautiful place, that innocent people, Good hygiene, remarkable disciplinary life... All just mesmerizing our mind to visit your village at least once in our life", Tinku sighs with his own tragedy as his family have been never taken him to any of the country side.

“Awe! That’s cool, we would be welcoming you, my fighting partner.” Nimmi says

“But, Nimmi, you are a blessed child ma”, Ramppo also sighs with his own situation.

“ Yup! What about you Tinku? Tinku”, Nimmi resumes the channel Tinku with her tired tune.

“Nothing happy to list guys, as Nimmi said. People here are suffering without food being joblessness. Generally, in my area, most of the people are daily wagers. So they can’t run their family right now. Even though, the NSS volunteers of many Colleges along with some NGO's are extending their helping hands, how long they could survive?

Day before yesterday I seated in my balcony holding a tea cup with coffee. I heard a lamenting voice. No one had died. But one old man of that slum area scattered his emotions into pieces of words and drizzling tears.

‘Whether our birth

In this earth

Is Sin?

We are hopeless

Even hook less

To stich my daughter's dress

And to purchase a pin

To stick the patched shawl

In the messy dress of my mistress.

Tell me God!

Our death will occur,

But how my Lord?

Either by Covid-19?

Else by this lockdown famine?’

What the hell this corona is destroying this mankind?” Tinku says.

“Cool Cool Tinku, yah, its really pathetic. I totally agree with that. But you have to be calm, don’t strain your mind”, Ramppo and Nimmi says as Tinku has Migraine.

“Hey guys!!.. You can stay with the call. I will be joining you within 15 minutes. My dad made a call!” says Ramppo happily.

When Ramppo shouts with joy, Campo thrown his mobile in the bed and Riya slipped the vessels in the sink and gathered in the living room.

“Hello my ladoos!” Richard voice made them to respire deeply.

“Honey, how are you? how is your health? did you take food in regular intervals?” Riya sympathizes

“Yeah, I am safe here and also satisfied here by treating the covid-19 patients, what about you my assets?” Richard says.

“You may be fine with your work but here, we are not at all good.” Riya Says

“ Dad I need to stab your belly with my little hand”, says Ramppo.

“ Dad! we are badly missing you every minute”, Campo feels.

“ My Sons and my Sun! Look dears, I am not opting medicine as my profession rather to earn merely in crore. But this is my passion, duty. I could sense the happiness of pain and sometimes pain of the happiness too. Understand my sweet hearts. Riya you have to make our children strong. Don’t get broken. I am safe here. Love you all” Richard again sweep his tears silently.

“ Anyway honey, be safe and do your duty. I will take care us. Love you allot!”

Riya Says.

“ And Ramppo, Campo what..... Sorry guys, I have to go”, Richard hang ups the call and gets back to his service.

“ Maa, don’t cry, he will be back soon. Let’s hope this corona will get its destined end soon”, Campo says and resume his Pub-g.

“ Guys, I am on board!” Ramppo joins again with the conference.

“ How is your dad?” Nimmi says.

“ Yes, he says he is fine there. But we know he is fine with his work but misses his mistress and children extremely as we does”, Ramppo says

“Hey guys! then, have you finished your assignments given by our class adviser through WhatsApp?” Nimmi says

“ Nimmi, just keep quite! In spite you have finished, don’t submit it in the group. If you do so, then they will begin to torture us to submit the same stuff.”

Tinku says

“ ha-ha.. Okay okay!” Nimmi laughs.

“And Guys, I have done with cooking!” Nimmi giggles herself after saying.

“ Nimmi, then we are talking to the master chef Miss.Nimmi” Ramppo commends

Tinku agrees and bursts out into laughter.

“Guys, in fact I can’t believe that I learnt to cook. Ha-ha”, Nimmi says

“What a miracle! Today’s girls are good at painting their face with makeup kit but too bad to handle the pan face to face! But you did it...” says Ramppo and laughs.

“Guys, When I switched youtube on, my granny thrown my mobile in the yard and scolded me to learn from them. And she questioned that whether the show time shouting lady would accompany me in my future? Or whether she was experienced than the little 70 years old lady(indicating herself)? And she instructed me with a stick in her hand. There I seemed like a monkey”

“yes. You are” Tinku laughs silently.

“What Tinku?” Nimmi says.

“Nothing.. nothing... I said You can. Not more than that”, kidding Tinku handles

“Hmm... Alright.” Says Nimmi.

“kudos for the panneer to get mingled with cheese

By my hands saying 'slowly' , 'gently'

I was good at emptying

The bowl filled recipes with chuckling

But too bad when it comes to me

To cook and book the same meal!

Eventhough I tried out a dish,

After entering the kitchen castle,

There I apologized first of all

All the vessels which I used roto to handle,

And all other stuffs who hath bad destiny

To creep in my hand, I thought.

Peculiarly, Frying Onion is crying

In the burning pan,

Wimping tomato is whispering

In the pool of oil there.

But at last I have finished and served

My entire family wished me with bliss!" says Nimmi.

" Ha-ha.. they might be wished you not to enter the kitchen here after it seems!" kidding Tinku makes Nimmi hyper.

"Just Shut up Tinku", Nimmi says.

"kudos Nimmi. What a pleasant sound! Wow!", Ramppo says.

"From my side?" Nimmi says

"Yes, it might be", says Tinku.

"yeah! That's the sweet humming of cuckoo. And also i am seated near the well, people here are ploughing the land with bulls. Second last field's people are irrigating their crops, the breeze just reach me after entering the massive sandal and neem. Bees are buzzing as I am sitting here." tendered voice of Nimmi renders over conference call.

" Nimmi, I am jealously listening your listicle!", Ramppo says.

" Guys, I have decided to stay here permanently with this innocent people and interesting atmosphere", says Nimmi.

" What do you mean Nimmi?", Tinku says

" Yes! I made my mind to shift my schooling here. The Government school which gave birth to many scholars, leaders", Says Nimmi.

" For a couple of months, its okay. But how could you manage yourself being completely with unsophistication", says Tinku.

"Then how could you stay with your parents? They are IT employees right?" asks Ramppo.

“Guys, let me tell. Tinku, sophisticated life doesn’t means getting the things we needed within a second very often. That sophisticated life should comprises happiness and contentment. I could feel that much level of intoxicant happiness here! And I would be happy to sift my school as well.” Nimmi says.

“Err...” Tinku ponders.

“Ramppo, and as you said my Parents are IT employees. Yes of course. But till the last week. Now they both have resigned their jobs and decided to do farm in our field” says Nimmi with high degree of proud.

“What! Wow! Your are really lucky in turn to get into that fantastic rural life.” Ramppo once again wonders.

“ Yeah!!!” Nimmi rejoices

“Guys, my family is waiting for me! We are gonna to take lunch, bye guys, will get connected soon” Nimmi bids bye

“Byeee”, Ramppo and Tinku too bids bye.

“ This Covid-19 has purified the impurities in the Earth such as controlled global warming, given time to the ozone layer to get reconstruct itself etc., Likewise it also impacted the minds of younger generation to enter the agriculture and made them to reconstruct their internet world to interactive world” says Riya.

“ True maa”, Ramppo says.

Then, Ramppo helps Riya in her kitchen works and daily domestic works.

Campo too admired Nimmi while Ramppo explains her plan.

These brothers then made their mind to set up **‘Terrace Garden’**. When they discuss the idea with their mom, she felt happy to the core.

“But right now where to buy the raw materials for the terrace garden set up?”

Ramppo and Campo ponders.

Riya nodded and takes them to their filthy Store room which was closed after the birth of Campo.

She takes all the green carpets, pots, jugs, and the needed stuffs for the terrace gardening.

“Maa, how is it possible for all these to get rested inside this messy room?”, Ramppo says.

“ My dears, I was doing these terrace farm before nineteen years. When my darling born, I made my entire time to you guys”, says Riya and smiles.

Then they three has their own time in this lockdown. Successfully completed their work of setting up all the properties. But its time to sow. They have no seeds right now.

Ramppo suggests an idea.

“Mom, shall we get an entry pass from police and get the seeds from Nimmi?”
Says Ramppo.

Ramppo and Campo are ready as the government has given relaxation from lock down.

But Riya thinks a lot let her children outside alone.

Finally she herself also accompanies them.

Riya witness her childhood dancing in the fields and playing with the flowers and cattles in the village nearby Nimmi's. She sweeps her eyes and hides her feelings for those fields.

When they reach Nimmi's village, they feel the spirit of the purity; true love. They are welcomed by the huge family of that Flower pot. Riya gets

emotional while their hospitality overwhelmed. Then, Nimmi takes them to the field.

“My goodness! Nimmi, we are also truly lucky to be here. Hurrah!!” says Ramppo.

Riya gets a call from her Richard. He says something unpleasant it seems. But somehow she manages the situation there.

As soon as they get the needed seeds from Nimmi, leaves the village leaving their heart there after seeing the wealthy fields.

After six months, they harvested the vegetables from their little terrace farm. Then Riya says,

“Yes! Humans planted saplings, nature gives him oxygen, shadow, fruits, etc., Yes! Humans nurtured the nature, she nourishes him with her wealth.

Yes! Humans began to destroy the Nature Mother, she is destroying the human monsters with an invisible virus to begin her new empire.

Try to understand the power of Capricious Nature!”

Few months flew away.

In this course of time, Covid-19 accelerated its speed and turned the densely populated countries into deadly suffering countries. India has its one third of population gone. Other developed countries too travelled back 20 years. Now, in Riya's family also a storm stretched its hand to destroy the remaining happiness.

“ Ramppo! Get up... it's already too late. Don't be the lazy boy as the school is next to our field” Riya makes her son wake up.

Ramppo, then takes the neem stick and brush up his tooth.

Meanwhile, Riya completes making the breakfast thinking about Campo, her first son; College guy; a hosteller now.

Ramppo and Nimmi bids them bye and enters their school.

Their school have arranged a prayer for the dead souls in the war against Covid-19.

Ramppo's eyes begin to beat.

“ True hero will never die. They will be staying in the hearts of millions for ever. And your dad Dr. Richard also stays in the hearts and minds of the numerous patients he had treated and also with us.” Nimmi says by holding the hands of Ramppo.

Then, Ramppo recalls his father's death after testing positive for Covid-19 by restlessly treating the patients without much concern about his health. And Riya's plan to shift their life to country side nearby Nimmi's village.

On that evening, Ramppo asks, “ why mom, we are here?”.

“Your Father's aim is to do service up to his 50 years and after that to live in this beautiful place. That's why he had bought this field five years ago. But now he is not with us to live. At least let us live his dream in this field”, Riya says and kisses the forehead of Ramppo.

9. JOHN DOE

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Once upon a time the kings and nobles lived and ruled were all good stories to hear but where are the stories of common men; are they left unspoken or unheard. The world is never ours to begin with. Powerful people come along and take their own control of the people who are unarmed. The future is never promised yet we are trying to rush things and want to settle better and rich. While on the one side people are trying to become more and more; on the other side, the unspoken are suffering silently without the other sides' knowledge. The poor always complains about how the rich take everything more than enough when they themselves don't even have enough. It is not their fault to blame the rich but it is the whole mankind's fault to shut their mouths when it needed to be spoken and covering their ears when it needed to be heard.

It is not the story happening in some other country or state or else corner of the world; it is the reality more than just a story of every man in some corner of the domain.

One unforgettable day it was. I was crossing the narrow road to get to the other side. The journey wasn't meant to be such long rather it was. I was weary and thirsty. The food I had prepared for my travel was left with no more than just a crust of bread and some crumbs of biscuits. It was not

enough for me yet I had no choice but to have whatever is left with me. I was about to eat the remaining but the man beside me looked at me like I was doing something wrong by eating the food in my own pocket. He stared at me. It wasn't just a stare; he looked like he had something more that words could utter. There was pain in his eyes. He has so much to say, I thought.

He had travelled miles to finally reach there and that I could understand from the way he was sitting there, like me he knew no one. He was all alone, sitting in the truck with nothing but a small bundle tied in his lungi. He was tired but wakeful of his tied bundle. The way he was holding onto that said more about his insecurities of that travel. I couldn't get his motive and all I could understand was his urge to reach his destination.

I offered my crust of bread to him, the same stare he gave me again. I offered it this time with some biscuit crumbs, he neither refused nor gave in. Something was stopping him from accepting from a stranger. He looked like he was not ready to risk anything which made me curious about that small wrap there in his lungi. I stopped gazing at that wrap otherwise he would never accept the food I was offering.

I took a bite from the bread crust and looked at him, then ate some crumbs. Of late I attempted to give the food. He got it from me at once and binge it in his mouth. He was eating like he had nothing for days. I didn't understand why I was trying to earn this man's trust when I should have eaten the leftovers myself. Whether it was curiosity of the man's story or the wrap in his cloth or the truth behind his painful eyes, I didn't get quite well. All I knew was that this man's physically there but not mentally. He seemed to be somewhere far from where we're.

He said, 'Thank you'. He didn't stop with that, 'I wish I could repay you. But I've nothing to give you'. I knew he has nothing left of him to pay back me. I just smiled and gave my hand to introduce myself. He turned his head away. I was disappointed. I thought he wasn't suitable for a travel companion. So I just tried to sleep until the last stop.

On the midway, the truck stopped and we were forced to get off from it. I knew no one except this man; it was like I knew him at the same time I didn't know him at all. He didn't tell me his name or why he was there or what was his destination. As it was afternoon time, the roads were bright but the sun had not any mercy. With the burning heat we were walking to whoever knows where. I was too tired to walk so I halted near a tree while most of the men who were travelling with me in the truck started walking.

The man, to my surprise stopped and sat beside me, still holding the wrap in his hand. I never knew someone strange as well as familiar as him. Before I start to ask something, he showed me his hands. It was full of wounds. His pain nailed hands were enough to detail the pathetic condition of his life. Unknowingly, I was staring at his eyes in order to know him better but I could not get him. Then with the easing silence I came to know that he was no strange or reserved man but an ordinary man, a common man.

His story was simple yet had complications. He was coming from a distant place. A small family of two kids, he never asked for luxury or money if not a normal sophisticated life for his children. Their life dependent on the daily wages otherwise there would be nothing to feed in the house. Struggling day and night was very tough for him. Many times, he tried to

give up but the face of his daughter comforted him and the cheering smile of his younger son made him feel like he has achieved every success out there.

As the man and his wife were daily wagers they have to go out there and earn for the day's bread. Every day was challenge in their life. He was working as a coolie in a construction site, earning not more than could feed his family for a day. His day begins at 7 am and ends at 7pm; whatever he earns between these hours was the real challenge.

Though he was struggling with daily wages he didn't fail to get his kids a proper education. His daughter was the student of a standard school. He couldn't afford to get his son to the same school as his sister. He believed in his kids more than he believed himself. So he earned all his money to get his children good education. He wanted great leaders to rise from his own house.

One day, the school management asked their students to pay the fees before the due. The daily wagers' daughter studying in such school was almost like a dream come true. The dream was at its shattering end when she was insulted by the teachers for delaying when others had already paid. The embarrassment she got was enough to make her father work day and night to bring whatever he could.

The next day was also the same. The girl, always of the conscious that she was no equal to other kids in the school, the shame was too much. The whole family was worried about the situation. They were in confusion about what to worry in the first place, their next day's food or the education. He himself went to the teachers and asked for more time. He was in rush to pay the money before they expel his daughter.

The people with money never consider the ones with no money, he lamented. I wasn't in any place to pity him. We both were tired. But he wasn't done with the story. We started walking because sitting there wouldn't make any difference as we both knew it.

Walking and walking we grew wearier. The man's legs started shivering so we stopped in a nearby tea stall. As it was by the government rules to not have any shops open, the stall was the only place where we were able to get something to drink. Not many shops or stalls were there so that one was crowded but we had no choice. After having eaten, he looked at me and said he again has nothing to repay me for all he has is nothing. I was curious to ask what was inside that bundle of safe keep but didn't want to scare him.

It turned evening, we were still walking. I asked him how he ended up there. He was supposed to be with his family but what happened after his daughter told him of the incidents happened in her school. The way he told me his story was not to make me feel sympathetic for him but to make me understand that not everyone's life is bed of roses some are living with only thorns.

The next day after he bought time from his daughter's school he went to working site. Unfortunately the day's earning was not meant to be. He has to be there in time if he wants that day's work and earnings. But that day he missed his chance, he was late. He begged his masters and friends for ways to earn before the due date. He was helpless. The poor father trying to get a better future for their kids got so much done; the self-respect mustn't be there. All he expected was some money to have the next day's bread.

He was even ready to go to other district or state for the betterment of his kids. So he joined in a club of coolies who were travelling to whatever district they were assigned. They were all like him; no less no more. They were all in need of money so they left theirs to make some money for the sake of their family. He ended up somewhere far from his own place leaving his wife and the children.

It wasn't easy, he told me and I wasn't sure how far I could understand his situation because in my case and most of the people's worries are never about the bread in their plate but cash in their purse. He had been struggling for more than a week. He was finally able to get more than he ever got but that was not to long last.

It was after the outburst of pandemic. A deadly disease was at its venture to kill people at its very onset. It was named as 'Corona', the king of all the viruses. Corona was not just named as king; it was actually ruling the world for some period of time. It made its own history by standing out from all the other deadly viruses. The virus was deadly and with people interaction through physical contact it could take up its chance. Human contact became a threat so everyone in the country was asked to stay inside their house in order to reduce the spreading of the mass killing disease.

People around the country were rushing to return to their hometown. There aroused the real issue of the case. The rich got their safe way back home while the poor left alone in the mass. People from different homelands were asked to return to their own but without any proper way back. The transportation facilities were poor as most of them were restricted by the same government which ordered the junta curfew in the first place.

The whole country was in immediate situation to get the people stop from coming out of their house. For the disease could spread through physical contact, sneezing, coughing, etc., etc. The rich were already started protecting themselves. Money is human's best friend at the same time the worst enemy. The one who had it did not have to worry about their place in the world and the one who do not have it have to go through tough situations to make it show them mercy.

I was asked to leave my job at once and return to my hometown. The week's work was tiring so I was actually happy to not work for some time. The money will be sent to me even without working was what I heard when leaving my office. I packed the necessary stuff for the travel. Without aware of how many days I would be staying in my hometown I stuffed my savings inside my backpack.

I travelled in a city bus until it was stopped by the patrol of cops. Transportation was also restricted because of the outbreak. It was a crucial situation for me as I was in the middle of the night without anyone to help get me back to my place. People were wearing masks over their faces. It was rather strange. If it were not for the pandemic then they would give a bizarre look for wearing masks but it was not the case that day. The masks became mandatory along with gloves. People are stupid to think that a mere mask could save their life from that virus but they wanted to believe it anyways. I was walking through some blocks before asking a man for lift.

It felt nice to have someone to talk about the current affairs. But I had to get off to catch the first bus going to my place. When I thought that the night could not get any worse i missed the bus. However, I was able to get to

the truck with a crushing crowd inside. The truck was where I met the man who was travelling by rickshaws, tractors and most of the time by walk. As he had no money he couldn't manage to reach his place earlier.

Like every one of us he was also shocked to hear the commotion, due to that he was asked to return to his own place and stay locked until the government gives the orders. He was in a helpless condition and all he could think about was his family. He heard it was a deadly disease but he knew that hunger is worse than that. He should earn for his family but there was no way he could do that by staying inside home. But most importantly, at that moment he should be home before something terrible happens.

He was travelling for more than three days, yet not reached. His family must be locked inside for those three days. He was wondering whether they have enough money to buy supplies or they have enough to feed themselves; he had so many questions inside. 'I hope they are at least alive', he said 'if we come outside we die of disease but if we stay inside then we'll die of hunger.' which made me think what kind of life we are all living. Unaware of the social condition of our own brothers yet we want more for ourselves.

He opened the wrap in his lungi. Inside were the earnings of the week more like a blood of his efforts. That amount was little but was so precious; he wanted it to reach his family before anything could happen. He told me that so many other people couldn't manage to get out from that site. Many workers and coolies were seen going back to their homeland by walking. Some of them were locked up when trying to leave the city. Yet he managed to come this far and he was relieved for that.

Nature was not on anyone's favour. It did not leave the rich as well as the poor. Anyhow the rich or the sophisticated people managed their safety. The poor were shedding tears of blood while begging for their safe return. Mass number of other district and state people started their journey back home. Only people blamed those helpless for making the issue even worse yet no one was there to help them. That day, I was also one of them, in the need to reach my destination whatever it takes.

The early sun rise, that man and I parted ways. Before he leaves he gave me a least valuable coin saying 'Thank you'. The first and last spoken word of him was that. He turned back for once and smiled at me. That smile had pain in it but there was also hope. He injected a great impact on me. So that I felt like I was the one to thank him for making me aware of what is there in other side of the world. No. It is not the other side of the world but every corner of the society has a man like this, a man who is struggling and thriving to make a life of his own.

I didn't see that man ever again in my life. I felt like finishing a book without knowing its end. I wish I read it more to know the happy ending. What happened to him; his family nothing I ever know. The man taught me so much in a single day what my years of education failed to do. Some people we meet then forget and some we never forget. He was that kind of man, a common man. Neither media nor social media were able to speak about this. The people's attention never turned to the side of the helpless as they were busy in recreating their own. The great corona swiped everything left of the poor people. Everyone started their normal life but still no one was ready to talk about the needy.

The pandemic was deadly but dying of hunger is far more pathetic than dying of a disease. The common people's unspoken needs to be spoken and heard unless we want to save the little bit humanity left.

“The life of a single human being is worth more than all the property of the richest man on the earth”

- Dr. Ernesto Che Guevera

10. Law written by God

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Why is life like this? Why should I live in this world? Why do I have so many problems? This thing often appears, whenever tribulations enter into our lives. There is no person who has never thought like this in this world. If not, there is a kind of fear about life. No one in this world, has not considered the real value of life. Instead all blame the happenings, this is the truth. But, God keeps a meaning for everything that happens in our lives. In fact, corona is the best example for us. Invisible little germ corona threatening us and keep us home for months. And it has taught everyone in this world a lesson and also makes a sense like love, an importance of money, and life. When thousands of temples, churches and mosques were opened people were not praying wholeheartedly to God. But now everything is closed and now they have started to pray to God wholeheartedly. Because they have so many desire in their lives. So, let us live and realize the real meaning of life from now onwards, thus he stopped his speech. But, there was no listener,, he was telling himself all these...

He had a lot of relations. However, there was no one to talk to him. In fact, he was very good sort of man and very godly man. But there was no one to respect him. His age was nearly seventy-five. Always he wore a white dhoti and a white shirt. He used to go for walk daily morning. If he comes across

any temple during his walk, he used to take off both of his shoes and start to pray to God in that place itself. On the way, if he meet any school children, he will put a cross on the forehead of the children and bless them.. This is an usual habit for him.

I am doing my Post graduate course in English literature. Since I am staying in the hostel, I used to go home only for holidays. When the holidays are over, I will head to the bus stand at 7am to go to college. My mother also will accompany me to the bus stop. Whenever I stand there, I used to meet that old man. He always wears a peaceful smile on his face.

I have met him for about six times. Whenever I see him, he begins to speak by saying "Praise the Lord". And he always talks to me in English. Then he questions me about my studies he asks whether I am an engineering student or student of medical college. I said that I am a literature student. But he fails to remember me and ask the same question all the time.

Whenever I meet him, he put a cross on my forehead. Then talks for a long time and ends the conversation by saying that he will be happy if I become a good teacher and then he will start to walk straight towards the path of his home. Whenever I see him, I will be very surprised. And whenever I see him, I will feel very happy.

I heard about his life story well after many months. He was born with silver spoon. From the very early age itself he had a strong attachment with God. Born into a wealthy family, he had no shortage of money. His parents raised him without any troubles. He is proficient in English. He speaks English fluently from an early age. He studied in convent, so he could speak English well. He would tell others about God when he was studying in

school. If someone comes to him for help, he will do it immediately without thinking. His parents also fostered him with affection and discipline. He and his parents were eager to help others often.

After completing his studies, he worked for a company. He started earning a lot. As he never experienced suffering in his life since childhood, there was no need for him to go to work. Because there were many properties. Unfortunately when he was working in the company, he suffered a slight failure. As he had so much faith in God, he was not disheartened.

He started working hard. His parents were proud of him. He was very interested in reading books. So his house was filled with books and appeared like a library. All the books he reads, was based on life. He excelled in knowledge and also excelled in his work. The times were moving in peace. He was very much dependent on God. Once in a week, he will preach in the church about God. He had kept God first in his life.

His parents decided to let him marry a woman by his own desire. Because, everything he does was just fine. But he wanted to get married only after he was good in his business. So he worked hard and got a good place in business. Then he had a desire to marry on seeing a gorgeous girl. So he wanted to marry that girl, she was his aunt's daughter. His aunt accepted without asking her daughter's consent. At that time they did things without getting any consent from the bride. Although the woman is not interested, it is okay for the people of that time. The girl was uneducated, but he was well educated. The girl belonged to a middle class family. She suffered from an early age. She has no father. Her mother worked hard and took care of her daughter. The mother of the girl was his father's sister. The bride was twenty

years old. But he was thirty years old. Both the parents of bride and the bridegroom had agreed for the wedding. The arrangements for the wedding were going on well. The wedding took place the following week in a wonderful way.

The circumstances of the family began to change slightly as the family was happy. Unexpectedly his company met with a great downfall. But his belief in God did not abandon him. Then after a few months as a result of his effort and also by the grace of God, the company had reached a large extent. While these things were going well, unfortunately one day his father passed away because of normal fever. He took some time to recover from the shock. All of his family members used to afraid for his father and obey his words. But after the death of his father, everyone began to cheat. His soft character was misused by everyone. But, he trusted everyone. But his mother was unable to bear the happenings. Despite telling her son, nothing is going to happen. So she came up with an idea of what to do.

In the epic Mahabharata, the five Pandavas obeyed his mother, Kunti Devi, like wise he too obeyed his mother's word from an early age. So her mother told her son to go abroad for a few months to work with his wife. If he stays there, his relatives would cheat him. She told her son that she will be there to take care of everything from there. He could not break his mother's word. So, he decided to move abroad with his wife.

But his wife too well knew what was happening around, and she told to her aunt that she will be with her. She decided to stay with her mother in law and asked him to go alone to abroad. He was very pleased to hear his

wife's attitude. Though his mother did not like the new couple's separation she accepted half - heartedly.

He went abroad and returned six months later. Until then, the daughter-in-law had taken good care of her aunt. After he returned from abroad, he began to look after his own company in his hometown. When he went abroad, the company responsibilities were taken care of by the assistant manager of the company.

Months rolled on, he became more interested in the business. With his experience of working in abroad, he learned a lot about the industry approach properly. So in industry his company reached a great height

His wife was pregnant. After coming from abroad, he took good care of his wife. Although they had a separation between them shortly after marriage she willingly accepted the separation, and she took good care of her mother-in-law. Thinking of this scarification of his wife, he was proud to be her husband. His mother also very proud of her daughter in law and her son. Later that She begot a boy baby.

He and his family had a great joy with full of fun. For each and every work at home, there were servants separately. He believed that if he give a job to the afflicted people, they too will get better in their life.

This is what he and his family member's assumption. This is what they thought. They even considered the people in their household workers to be one of the members of their family. He helped those in his hometown as much as he could, by providing meals for everyone, building home for the homeless, buying clothes, and educating their children. He extended his hands towards the poor and needy.

So everyone in the town had a special respect for his family. His house was more beautiful than palace. The house was surrounded by beautiful coconut tree, neem tree, mango tree, teak tree, guava tree, pomegranate tree. And there was a large garden, situated behind his house, where they cultivate all vegetables for their family. He did not have to go to the store and buy everything as he had enough vegetables at home. If they want some other things it would be brought by his housekeepers.

Happiness flowed through his life, and the only worry was that his father wasn't alive. A year passed, as the train passed. His baby's first birthday came, so he invited everyone in the town to eat and celebrated the function in a very luxurious way. The days were running out. The son grew older. In order to study his further studies of degree, his father decided to send his son to abroad. As he learned business from abroad, he wanted his son to be knowledgeable one and also he had a thought about the responsibilities in doing business.

Being the only son, he was very sad and so his wife and mother. They have never been apart even a single day, since the day his son's birth. Then everyone's mind changed, for the benefit of their son. Great affection between the grandmother and the grandson. The boy (Grandson) was always taken care by his granny. She would do everything for her grand son from his childhood days like bathing, feeding and telling stories etc. When the grandson went abroad, he felt difficult to leave his grandmother.

A few months later, his mother had a decline in health. He did not tell his son anything about his grandmother's health. In that situation, the father did not tell to his son. Because, his son could not bear it, and thinking that

he would quit his studies and leave. So that he did not reveal the things about his mother. He would tell his son that his grandma was fine when his son was talking on the phone.

As the boy's granny gets older, the ear of his granny does not hear properly. The grandson didn't have patience to talk to his granny on the phone. So, he would talk to his grandmother only once a month.

So it was easy to deal with his son. Even if he would tell his father to give the phone to his granny, he would say that grandmother was asleep. So he would not disturb his grandmother anymore, and said to his father that "say I asked about granny", then he hanged the call.

It's been a year since he left home, and it's been two months grandma was sick. In this case, the grandson had a vacation for a month so he informed his father that he would return to their native place. His only fear was that his son will not tolerate the situation. The grandson came home and called for grandmother when he got out of the car. Then searched the whole house, and the grandmother was nowhere. After some time, his father told him everything that had happened.

He then took his son to the hospital where his mother was admitted. When the boy saw his grandmother, controlled his weeping and said Grandma, your grandson had come, get up and talk to me. On the next moment, his granny was no more. All cried a lot. The grandson had a great sort of anger with his father.

He had more affection for his grandmother than his parents. After attending his grandmother's funeral, he fled away from his native place to abroad with an angry without understanding his parents. Since left he had

never spoken to his father by phone. He would talk to his mother for some other day. But he stopped it shortly. His mother always supported only for her husband. So, he did not like to talk with his mother also.

The concerns alone began to enter into the life of both the husband and wife. His wife got heart attack. He thought that If he doesn't say this about the health condition to his son, his son will be too angry than before. So, he called his son to inform all the things. But his son saw the call and switched off the mobile. Then the son changed his number also. So, the man couldn't contact his son.

The house filled only with happiness before has sunk into grief now. The only occupant, he knew very well about him. He was the one who did all the works for him all the household works. Days began to move. The son lost his business. A lot of money was needed to compensate for it. So he planned to visit his hometown and then he arrived. He got out of the car and entered into the house with his wife and his one years old son. Upon entering the house, he looked for his mother. His father came inside. When he saw his son's wife and his child who had accompanied him, the old man began to burst into tears from his eyes.

In the holy bible, the book Luke deals with a story about the prodigal son, in which the father gave a warm welcome to his son after he repented for his sins. And also the last wishes of old man's wife. Then he invited his daughter in law and son to step into the house. Then the old man lifted his grandson and played with the cute boy happily. Then he narrated the entire story about the death of his wife.

Then the son told the story about his marriage. Slowly his daughter-in-law began to tell to him about the failure of her husband's company. His daughter-in-law did not know Tamil but knew English very well. As he was proficient in English, he was able to listen the speech of his daughter-in-law. When she said everything to her father-in-law, her husband was not there in home. After some time, his son came to the house. When the old man saw his son, he went to speak to his son. He even took the bond in hand. In it, he wrote everything in the name of his son except for the house in which he was staying. He went to give it to him. Giving the property to his son, he said him to take it. He also insisted to start business by using that property. At first he refused to have the property from his father, but later he accepted it. Because, he wanted to trust him.

Even though his wife talks to his father, she joined with her husband and planned a plot against her father in law. He pretended to be good sons with his father for a month and so his wife. She also acted to care her father-in-law along with her husband. He was very happy and thought that his son and daughter-in-law were going to stay with him. And he spent most of his time with his cute grandson.

A month later, his son and his wife said to the old man that they were going to foreign and take everything from there. Until then, "Take good care of your health father" said his son and his wife and left with their baby from the place. He trusted his son's words and happily sent off his son, daughter-in-law and grandson to abroad. A month passed, the son who promised to return did not come with his family. He didn't talk to his dad on the phone after he left. Only then the father realised that his son had cheated him and

bought the property from him. He felt very sad and thought that from that day onwards God alone was his companion and he began to live his life without anyone.

Even though he was married and had children, daughter-in-law, and grandson in his life, God has appointed him to live his life alone. Then his daughter-in-law and his son cheated and snatched all the property from him instead his house and left him alone. He had a home and a little property. Then onwards he surrendered himself to God like an orphan. But until the very end, his allegiance to God did not change forever in his life. He never blamed about God or concerns about his life. Instead He lived with great faith in God.

He met so many problems in his life. Yet he does not concern about this life or not to tell others about his condition. I was very disturbed, when I heard the story about him. Nevertheless, this is a law that God gave him. Still now, I don't know his name. So I named him "super grandpa".

11. Pages of My Diary

Mandavi, India

Dear Readers,

If you've found my diary and are able to read it, it clearly means that you're safe and doing well. Congratulations, my friend! I am going to trust you with my life and I hope that you will not judge me or the way I have led my life. To tell you the truth, there's nothing exciting about my life but if you're still reading, I know that you're here to stay because you're intrigued. I would hate to keep secrets from you and would like you to know that I wrote this diary, sitting in a prison cell.

If you flip through all these awfully long pages, you'll finally be able to reach a note that I've left for you at the end.

I dedicate to you all pages of my diary.

With love,

Page 1

Day 1 in the prison

Hear, O Ear!

I peer through my window pane and rub my eyes in disbelief as the world outside appears to have been covered under a blanket of darkness. I hear

footsteps outside my cell but they turn faintly inaudible as I try to listen keenly. I do hear barking dogs chasing cars that pass by in hours. This road is not a home to them anymore but a large space echoing silences which is unusual and eerie. Trees outside make a whistling sound and a few birds fly by twittering but I don't hear brakes screeching, infants babbling or a group of friends laughing heartily on busy streets.

I am confined into a cell and my world is this dingy corner and a half broken window pane. I'm attempting to follow sound patterns to be able to make sense of my new life here and these are my observations for the day.

(Emily Dickinson : Of all the Sounds despatched abroad

There's not a Charge to me

Like that old measure in the Boughs—

That Phraseless Melody—

The Wind does—working like a Hand –

Whose fingers comb the Sky—

Then quiver down—with tufts of tune—

Permitted Gods—and me—)

Page 6

Day 4

I see a sea

I am trying to adjust here and I realise that I might have to stay here for a much longer time than I had expected. I've made terrible mistakes, been a miserable person, been a sinner and honestly, I never had a moment to stop to reflect. I could never dwell upon my mistakes because I never had the required time to think. What was my usual routine like before being put into this dingy cell?

I would wake up early morning, take breakfast, head to office, work till late hours, have dinner and doze off then wake up to repeat what I had done the day before. One day, I woke up and realised that I was none other than Gregor!* (Kafka's Gregor from *The Metamorphosis*) I had transformed into someone else and then I landed up in a cell.

Earlier, I tried to follow sound patterns during the first three days but I've begun to notice things through my eyes now.

There's no road and no streets that I had probably made up inside my head when I wrote the last time. There's a sea before me, a sea where people are drowning but very few hands reach out to rescue them. People are afraid of the drowners as I call them (drowners are those who almost drowned) but when they're pulled out, they're put in bigger cells than the one I'm in at present. Those bigger cells I've heard are darker, glum, deserted and you either return from those as a survivor or you never return, leaving your loved ones wailing. Many of the drowners swam across from other parts of the

world but when they did that, swarms of people around them got severely affected and now.. I see a sea of drowned and drowners... I wish, I could pull them out but my hands are stuck in this little window pane.

Perhaps, I can just do best by staying confined. I see the sea of despair coloured in pale yellow melting into black. I don't know what it is but the splashes of black and yellow are speeding to merge with the entire sea. I shut my window pane in fear! What if a droplet of sea water climbs up to my window pane and drops down into my coffee mug?

*(Of The Sea By Rainer Maria Rilke "Timeless sea breezes,
sea-wind of the night:
you come for no one;
if someone should wake,
he must be prepared
how to survive you.")*

Page 35

Day 21

Tickling the tongue

I've not looked at the world outside in days because the image of the sea continues to haunt me. There were times when I would head out to grab a

snack from a Junk food junction but I realise with a loud thud growling inside my heart that I'm locked inside the cell. I cannot head out and to lift my mood, I made myself a beautiful cake to tickle this tongue of mine! Infusing powdered coffee with melted chocolate, I'm hell bent on seducing my tongue with a secret recipe. It had been demanding a grand meal and I had to look into the matter personally to prevent it from indulging in secret affairs.

I've written couplets on naked sheets of paper, clothing them with words of profound love and learnt Zumba, tapping my feet swiftly through videos, I've watered dying plants in want of compassion, sung lullabies to myself when Mister Insomnia insisted on staying over on solitary nights, read great romances to keep the hopelessly romantic alive within me- yet nothing has kept my senses intact. This shall be my last attempt on saving me from withering away in the blurred sky.

I look at the cake with longing eyes and it begins to melt in my mouth. I drop tears because it doesn't tickle my tongue like it used to in the past.

It tastes like nothing- my life feels like nothing.

(Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett, "Nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful.")

Page 49

Day 43

I am planning to escape the prison because I know that I cannot be here forever. I cannot look out, cannot hear a word, and cannot feel taste. I'm sans senses.

I've a plan and I'm tirelessly working on it.

Page 57

Day 50

I'm a sinner, I know but how long can I be confined into a space? How long, I ask?

Page 60

Day 55

Silences silence speech

I feel hollow, as if my throat is parched like my soul. I utter words but they make no sense and I'm rendered speechless, not because I experience

emotions but because I feel nothing. I don't feel anything; neither a pang of woe nor a tinge of delight. I cannot speak for life has come to a halt with me stuck inside this dingy cell. Sisyphus had made peace with his rock but can I ever make it with my cell?

I've been a terrible person who thought that there was enough time for everything but inside the cell, you know that time fools you.

I've lost a sense of everything.

(It feels like my life has been reduced to this famously quoted line by Shakespeare from his renowned play, As you Like It - "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.")

Page 77

Day 63

I cannot hear the chiming of bells.

I heard a rumour that bells of hope would be rung but my ears have stopped responding to sounds.

Page 83

Day 68

I smell death but nothing else- I've become hopeless inside the cell.

Page 90

Day 73

Sunlight spreads its luminous wings on my window pane but it doesn't touch my eyes because I cannot see anything clearly- not anymore.

Page 95

Day 78

I touched myself today to ask if I'm still alive. I have lost the sense of touch. I couldn't touch my body but my fingers crawled and crept inside to reach my soul. I am a body trapped inside a soul that desires freedom.

Page 102

Day 81

I shall walk free today. I've devised a plan and if it works out, I'll never have to be in the cell again.

Page 111

Day 84

I live in the past and that's the home I cannot return to. I feel an empty ache of numbness devouring my soul, feeding upon my heart, puncturing my existence and if I've reclaim what's mine- my life.

Page 117

Day 86

Freedom?

I was inside the cell for so long that I had forgotten how the outside world felt or looked like. When I marched outside today, nobody stopped or asked me questions and I was surely going to kiss dew of freedom. Freedom tastes sweeter than nectar but was I prepared for freedom? Is this what I would perceive as freedom?

As I walked past people and things, I experienced a sudden feeling of claustrophobic anxieties invading and taking control over my mind. This isn't where I belong- This isn't the world where I took a fresh breath almost three months ago. In this new world, People turn their faces away when you

approach them, the half open shops lie almost empty and everyone has their faces covered. You don't even know if behind the covered faces is a crooked smile or a broken mouth, a cordial lip murmuring hello or a bleeding lip pleading for help.

I had imagined all these days when I was closed inside that the world outside would be enormously welcoming towards me, stretching its arms to embrace me but here I am gasping for air and fresh breath.

I had imagined that I would finally be able to see with my eyes open, feel deeply with a vanishing numbness, hear with a sense of reason, touch with ardent compassion but the world collapses before my eyes- It's crumbling down and this isn't where I belong.

This is not what I had wanted and I see an army of dauntless warriors rushing, panting; extending hands to the drowned and drowners. These are people that cease their steps for a second and look at me; as if envying me, as if sighing, "Wish we could stay closed up in a cell like you but we've bigger cells calling out."

I don't belong here and I lazily return to my cell, uncovering layers of delusional freedom from my face.

(The Second Coming by W.B Yeats, "Turning and turning in the widening gyre

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,..”)*

Page 128

Day 90

This cell is my home where I sit in the evening with my family and this is where I feel free. After returning from the world where I don't belong, I figured out that this narrow space is a smaller prison but the one outside is a greater one.

I had been grappling with battles within me, one outside and another inside. The one inside is mine alone and I can be a warrior too, if I stay here; battling what's inside.

(“Wherever you are, and whatever you do, be in love”- Rumi)

End....

Note:

Dear Readers,

I know that you have skipped a page or two and I wholeheartedly forgive you but will you be able to forgive me for what I am to say to you?

You could closely associate with my perplexities, feel them gnawing and nibbling your senses because you're going through the same. The cells that you've been confined to are your homes but the world outside feels like a greater prison in a COVID hit period of absolute uncertainty.

You feel numb and have lost interest in doing anything, feel the maddening rush to venture out, rising in mutiny but sadly, staying home feels like a safer and a better option.

You can save the world, be a warrior, live long to narrate your story like this one but you've to calm yourself down first.

Yes, you have sinned and have been a terrible person because you took little things in life for granted, did not live in the moment because you falsely believed that you had all the time of the world but perhaps, you did not. Today, when you are alone in your company, life has hit you hard with the greatest truth of life which is that nothing in the world matters more than cherishing moments of love and compassion.

You worry excessively for the safety of those you hold closest to your heart and wouldn't take any chances when it comes to protecting them. You know

how all of this feels because this story and this diary are not just mine- This is our story; ours.

I am a reflection of You and You are of Me.

Are we the same, my dear reader?

All pages of my diary are dedicated to you, with love.

Diary dated: 2020

12. Corona Rush

Joseph E Ahiman Benitez, The American College, Madurai

“Daddy! Daddy! Corona is chasing us, Run! Run!” Shouted a seventh Std. school boy named Ilamahil Marshal, Son of a physics professor of a well reputed college in Madurai. “Don’t panic my dear son! It’s not like animals or anything else to chase you. It’s something that no one can see it” said Arivu Mathew with a counseling tone.

“That’s why daddy, it’s more dangerous and serious I am telling. We all are goanna die Daddy. No one is going to save us. Did you watch the new? The virus spread is getting aggravated.”

“Ya! I too watched this evening news. We are alone responsible for our safety. You know! We shouldn’t roam around unnecessarily” said the father.

“Did you notice the government statement ‘learn to live with corona’?” asked Kayalvili, mother of Marshal, a house wife.

“Ya! That’s correct! Government is talking about the individual responsibilities.

Already we are living with many deadly things around us like dangerous diseases Dengue, Malaria and so on. Even gas-stove, pressure cooker etc. are sometimes dangerous you know, but we learn to deal with these items. Such a way we need to adopt the measures and instruction given by the government” replied Arivu.

“We have a small daughter of three and a half years. How does she know certain things like social distancing, cleanliness and all?” said Kayalvili, in an affective tone.

“We are there to protect our own kids” said Arivu.

“I am safe daddy, I love you daddy” said the little child Sarah Sangeetha. Mathew hugged her tightly with a smile.

“God only should protect us” said Kayalvili by shrinking her face at Arivu and continued her kitchen work in preparing dinner.

“Daddy! What shall we do daddy to protect ourselves? We are already following the rules of government but still I am afraid” asked Ilamahil.

“You know one thing; Madurai is the safest place. No natural calamities has hit so far in my known history. We are safe here and Corona is so severe in Chennai only. If we take some precautionary measures we will be safe.”

“Daddy Kannagi demolished Madurai once know. I have learned in Tamil book. Is it true?”

“Yes! Every one say this but it’s a myth” said Arivu.

“That time it was her revenge for killing her husband but this time it is God’s revenge for spoiling the nature. We have no chance of escaping. I lost hope Daddy.”

“Ooh then we should migrate to any forest place because only there we can separate ourselves from other people. Most importantly animals don’t have corona and we will be safe there. HA! HA! HA!.... Just joking my dear.”

“Daddy! It’s a very nice idea. Shall we move on there? I don’t like to be here anymore.” said Ilamahil.

“Hey Marshal! I was just joking da. It cannot happen. And there we cannot survey after enjoying the city life benefits” said the Father in a rejecting intention.

“No Daddy! It’s possible. We shall be there till corona gets over here Daddy” said Ilamahil and started to surf in the Internet about some nearby forest areas around Madurai.

“If mom hears this she will blow both of us with the broken broom. Keep quiet” said Arivu with a meek voice looking at the door of the kitchen.

“Daddy! I will convince mom. Look here, Kodaikanal forest, Palani forest and some few forests are very nearby to Madurai. Let’s get in to any one of it. Also I have found in YouTube regarding the survival in such remote areas with limited things. Lots of tips have been found in the Net Daddy. We can definitely make it. Let’s try this. It will definitely work Daddy.

Please say yes dad.”

“I don’t know. Dinner is getting ready! I am hungry now” said Mathew, occupying the center seat on the dining. Ignoring Ilamahil’s talk, Arivu started watching some news updates.

“Food is ready!” Shouted the Mom and brought them to table.

Marshall said to himself. “I will definitely make it happen.” After the dinner, he went to bed. Thinking about this deeply and slept without his knowledge.

Now, it is Illamahil Marshal.

‘Daddy! Are you all ready?’ I asked Daddy.

‘Yes my dear Marshall Kanna. You finally made it. How did you convince your mom?’

‘I told the seriousness of this matter and she accepted it’ I replied to dad.

‘Ok what are the things we should take with us?’ Dad asked me.

‘I browsed through the NET and learned that we need to take some tent materials rope, multipurpose knife, solar chargeable torch, and some food grain for few months. And most of the time Daddy! We should depend up on the food stuff available in forest like fruits, roots etc.’

‘Ok where are we going?’ asked mom to me.

‘Daddy! It’s a forest under Kodaikanal hill station named “Vellimalai” a very dense forest. Is it ok?’

‘Ok I have heard that there are so many wild animals living. And, in nearby area one of my friend Vairava’s village is located’ said Daddy.

‘Then no problem! We can park our car in his house and we shall trek in to the forest’ I said to Daddy.

‘Daddy! You are being a physics professor you can deal with the technical works there and mom will take care of cooking. Sara and I will help both of you. Okay!’

After loading everything in the car, we reached Vairava uncle’s house. He advised us not to go there but dad told him that it was his life’s interest to live along with nature for some days. Then he allowed us to proceed towards the forest.

We waved off our hands to that uncle for saying Tata! After crossing a river from where the forest limit starts. A bit of fear spread all through my body

from the head like a feel that of drinking cold water during hot summer afternoon which we can sense the travelling of water through the throat to stomach. I didn't show it out but my mother's face was fear stricken. She was terribly afraid of wild animals and snakes. That time, Sara cried for food. Mom gave her some biscuits and chilled her up. We went on searching for a perfect place to place the tent. Half a day we were walking towards the middle of the forest. We were tired and suddenly found a pool of water. Dad said this should be the perfect place for resting. I read in a pdf. file that I stored in my mobile that such place won't be a safer one because most of the animals come there to drink water. I said to dad. And then we moved forward. At last, in half an hour we found a safe place. There was a big tree with a huge trunk and a small stream intersecting the place. We planned to build a house on the top of the tree in spite of constructing a tent on the ground so that, we can safeguard ourselves from the attack of wild animals and other forest dangers. Immediately we started collecting bamboo poles, tree barks and leaves. With little tent materials, we managed to build a ladder first and then a flat surface up on the tree top. The first day we sat up on the surface area on the top and had the food that we took with us. Dad only did the majority of work. Making a flat surface on the tree and fitting them firmly to support four of our weight required dad's physics creative ideas. Sara and I went in search for fruit bearing trees and other useful resources within around 200 meter distance. We found Jack fruit trees and some forest fruit trees that we didn't even know some of them are edible or not. Dad was little busy with roofing the tree top house with the available plastic tent material and leaves so that when rain comes we all will be safe in

the night. Dad was more concern about our safety. Soft couch like set up was made with in the tree top house by my dad to have a relaxed stay. My mom was assisting my dad along with a murmur that she was not comfortable with the new environment and she didn't actually like the decision of me. But the fear of corona only took her there with us. The challenges in the forest were many. We had a scary night because it was a new environment to us hearing the terrifying forest animal's and bird's sounds. Even the little movement of the tree frightened us. Sara slept in between dad and mom so that she felt home like and had sound sleep. But my parent and I didn't have a good sleep. We half relieved from a kind of psychological pain only after the break of the morning. In the second day, my dad again worked on remodeling the tree top house to make it perfect and permanent. He added some fig thread to strengthen it.

That time, all of us were at the top. We heard a roaring sound from the bushes. We were all silently watching around. We saw a hairy big creature penetrating towards the bushy plants with a majestic walk. That was a lion. We all were in utmost fear seeing the beastly creature. We all were trembling. From the leg to the head it was shaking without our control. All our voices suck water. Air alone came out from my mom's mouth. It went away after a while. We decided not to go down after. Later dad alone went for fetching water in the stream and safe back. Days past in the fear and we started adapting the fearful life.

My dad started working on generating electricity because during night times we didn't have enough light. We had with us some old mixer motors and grinder motors that my Daddy took with him foreseeing its necessity. He

started setting up wind power electricity generator. He erected it above the tree and it worked because of the heavy wind. And we got electricity. Using that we could charge our mobiles. During night times, we used our mobiles as torch. This how, we managed living a forest life. After a month we even forget the word “corona” and city life. We liked more and more the peaceful forest life such a tension free life. I then realized that living along with nature alone can give peace to mind. My dad didn’t have any sort of work pressure and depression. He enjoyed playing with me and Sara. We found many forest animals that went across our tent and we didn’t hunt any one of it because I strictly told my dad that we are going to stay in the place of wild animals so we should not disturb them. Monkeys became our close friends. They often makes visit to our tree top house.

Months passed. Life went on smooth many months till one day morning. We got up from sleep and found Sara missing. We three were terribly shocked. We didn’t know what to do. We decided to go and search for Sara in three directions. Though my mom was very much scarred of forest dangers, she went in finding Sara all alone in one direction. We cried desperately the name Sara as much louder as we could. Multiple of thoughts were running in me. I shouted seeing at the sky saying it was my mistake that I have only brought them all and I put them in trouble.

We went around 3 to 4 km within the forest but didn’t even find any trace of her anywhere. However we returned to our tree top house in the evening bare hands. All three of us were crying desperately and we were helpless. I said I am the reason for this. Tears were flooding. I started beating down on the ground that I couldn’t bear the pain of my little sister’s loss. Nobody was

there to help us. Dad said we need to inform this to the police and we need somebody's help. First, we have to go in to the town. Mom was speechless. I couldn't console her. My deep sorrow on her missing affected me a lot.

When we return to our home, we found no one around. All the houses were locked. No human trespass anywhere found.

My bed became wet by my tears.

"Why are you crying my dear?" asked Mathew, holding a cup of morning coffee.

Marshal with a glumness looked around, gave a strange look at everyone uttering "Sara! Sara!" Dad asked "what?"

Sara came before him and gave a slap on his cheek and asked him "why are you crying you crying goose?"

Marshal now only realized that it was a dream. He told his dream to his family members and said it was really a bad morning for him.

Mathew tapped on his shoulders and said "don't worry my son. We are all safe in our house. We don't want to worry about anything else okay."

"We parents are here to protect you my lovely creature" said the mom hugging him tightly and rubbing his hair.

"We should not run away from this kind of pandemic disease my son. Our four fathers are genius; they had taught us various techniques on how to face this kind of tough situation" said father.

“How Daddy?” asked Marshal

Dad explained “Whenever they got chicken pox or similar kind of diseases they used to quarantine the infected person in a separate room. The person had been made to lie down on neem leaves spread cot. They had sprayed turmeric everywhere around the house. Even, the family member of the infected person had followed social distancing and had not even visited their neighbor’s house, temple etc. Neem leaves used to be tied in front of the infected person’s house which will signal to everyone that some infectious disease had been affected somebody in the house said the father.”

“Making ourselves in isolation itself is a best method of preventive measures my dear. For this we don’t want to fly away anywhere. We should first of all avoid the contact of virus from outside. Cleanliness is first and foremost. We should stand and fight the virus my dear” advised Mathew.

“Yes Daddy! You are correct. I understood. Hereafter I will follow my ancestors in keeping myself and houses free from virus and germs.”

Stay
Home

Be
Safe

KEEP
YOUR
DISTANCE

Don't
go
out!

WRITE
A
LETTER

Read
a
book

Online
Chat

Phone
a
friend



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